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La Tourette



Le Corbusier

La Tourette, built near Lyon in 1960 for the Dominicans, was Le Corbusier's last religious masterpiece. Here in the French countryside the architect of the residential blocks near Marseille, Nantes and Berlin, of the Indian city, Chandigarh, and of the chapel at Ronchamp, attempted to translate into twentieth-century architectural terms the mendicant nature of the Dominican order. Anton Henze's text considers the position of sacred buildings in the work of Le Corbusier, and then takes the reader on a tour of the monastery, discussing the architectural features and the underlying religious imagery. Bernhard Moosbrugger's fine photographs, showing the monks at work and prayer in their monastery, succeed in evoking the human scale and function of architecture in a way that few architectural books achieve.



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Anton Henze

LA TOURETTE The Le Corbusier monastery

Photographs by
Bernhard Moosbrugger

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The Dominicans are preaching brothers and constitute one of the orders of mendicant friars. From earliest times the city has formed the sphere of their existence and the forum of their activity. It is in the cities that their monasteries and churches are found. When the French province of Lyon built the monastery of Sainte-Marie de la Tourette near Eveux-sur-l'Arbresle they broke with this as well as with a number of other traditions. The monastery lies in remote country between meadow and forest on one of the ridges beyond which the blessed vineyard country of Beaujolais begins. The effect of the architecture is as surprising as the site. The concrete mass belies the traditional appearance of a monastery.

In matters of faith conflict is good, said St. Thomas Aquinas. Seeing the monastery of La Tourette and knowing its architect, we might suppose that in planning their building the Dominicans of Lyon had applied their great brother's saying to architecture. We should be wrong. There was no opposition to Le Corbusier's design, no scandal arose to mar the spiritual fitness of the plan. The architect can never before have realised a large building which caused him as little vexation as La Tourette.

Did he recall the scandal of La Sainte-Baume while he was at work at La Tourette? La Sainte-Baume lies among the maritime hills between Marseille and Toulon. It is one of the sacred places of France. Legend has it that Mary Magdalene spent the last years of her life there and her skull is preserved as a relic in the basilica of Saint-Maximin at the foot of the Saint-Pilon mountain. The land on which the grotto of the Magdalene lies belonged to the geometer Edouard Trouin. The idea occurred to him one day of establishing a haven of peace and forgiveness there. He went to Paris and submitted his wishes to Le Corbusier. The man and his idea pleased the architect. In the year 1948 he worked out a building programme for La Sainte-Baume. The grotto was to become an underground church divided into three parts. At the edge of the rocky plateau rose buildings several stories high, the residential units of which suggested hermits' cells, places of peace and contemplation. A hotel met the needs of pilgrims who were pressed for time. The plan was so simple and so good that it should have come quietly to completion. But it resulted in a scandal. Catholics and atheists alike attacked and poured scorn on the idea of a modern hermitage.

Le Corbusier was used to being misunderstood. All the same, the world's response to his plan for La Sainte-Baume hurt him deeply. A few years later, when it was proposed to him that he should build a pilgrimage chapel at Ronchamp, he refused. It is one of the pieces of good fortune in the history of art that Lucien Leduc, secretary of the Commission for Ecclesiastical Art in the archbishopric of Besançon, managed to make him change his mind. Le Corbusier went to Ronchamp and built the pilgrimage chapel of Notre-Dame-du Haut. The commission called for a building in which the liturgy and popular devotion,

the offering at the altar and the worship of the solitary pilgrim, should be reconciled. Both individual pilgrims and groups of different sizes make the journey to a pilgrimage chapel. They want to pray before the sacred image and to celebrate mass with the priest. Le Corbusier selected for the chapel a ground-plan of which the interior figure is a trapezium. The altar wall is on the longer side; the shorter side is formed by the west wall. In front of this and along the north wall the body of the chapel flows into semi-circular subsidiary areas. These are occupied by altars. The ground-plan, which is a combination of trapezium, triangle and circle, provides liturgical areas for groups of four different sizes. There is room in the nave for about 200 people and in the subsidiary chapel for congregations of 30, 20 and 10 pilgrims. The sacred image stands in a glass case which pierces the altar wall. In front of it is arranged a group of short benches. There the solitary pilgrim finds room to rest in contemplation and silent devotion. The interior furnishings of the altar wall, including the altar, pulpit, sacred image and choir, face outwards like a Janus's head. They are situated in a wide altar recess, which gives on to the parvis for the pilgrims and in front of which, on the great feast-days, the processions form for mass. On a small surface the ground-plan provides for a brilliantly integrated series of built-in areas. Le Corbusier continued its free forms up into the building. The chapel he erected is an example of the dynamic, flowing space produced by a perspective architecture departing from the rectangular ground-plan and box-shaped space. In a free-form ecclesiastical building which, nevertheless, fully serves its high purpose, he for the first time achieved the possibility of extracting the sum of all his essays, ideas and projects in architecture, sculpture and painting. Here he used all those elements which ultimately still seemed valid to create a synthesised work of art, which is the "expression of the three great mutually dependent arts". The memorable product of this creative harmony was a new architectural form for the Christian church.

In the year 1906 Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, who later called himself Le Corbusier, went travelling in Europe. The young man filled book after book with sketches of squares, buildings and monasteries and grew into an architect as he moved around. The influence of a visit to the Carthusian monastery of Ema in Italy was to endure. The architecture of the monastery, simply and functionally conceived, though ample and beautiful in its pure relationships, struck him as exemplary. The relationship of the individual to the community, as represented by the monastery building, impressed him. He encountered in its architecture the spirit of the monks: they were to cross his path later. In the year 1925 the Capuchins of Blois won his services for the Union des Artistes Modernes, in which the masters of French art turned their attention to ecclesiastical commissions. The shrine of La Sainte-Baume, to which Le Corbusier devoted his first attempt at sacred building, was in the care of Dominicans. Père Régamey and Père Cou-

turier, two of the Parisian Dominicans who worked tirelessly for the renewal of religious art in France, secured the commission at Ronchamp for him.

Le Corbusier, therefore, had experience when, in the year 1953, his friend Père Couturier suggested that he should build the Dominican monastery at La Tourette. In spite of this, the Dominican urged him to go to the abbey of Le Thoronet, which seemed to him to be the essence of a monastery, to study afresh a medieval building dedicated to monastic silence, meditation and devotion. Père Couturier also expounded to his friend the rules by which Dominicans live. His letters contain plans for the new monastery, which he hoped would be "in its poverty one of the purest and most significant architectural works of our time". Le Corbusier went to work at a monachal pace, taking three years over his sketches, plans and models. He went to Eveux and made drawings to give him the bearings of the site which the building was to occupy. He told himself that only a Romanesque or an Assyrian fortress could hold its own against these horizons. But that, since it is impossible to build in either the Romanesque or the Assyrian style, a building must be put up in a contemporary idiom which is at once monumental and spiritual.

Le Corbusier reflected upon the history and life of the Dominicans. The Friar Preachers of St. Dominic emerged from a community of priests who preached the true faith among the Albigenses, a 13th century sect in southern France. In the year 1215 Dominic transformed them into an order dedicated to spreading the faith among believers and unbelievers. Since the Fourth Lateran Council of the same year prohibited the founding of new orders, he gave his new community the Rule of St. Augustine, the oldest monastic rule in the west. He had grounds for this choice. The original community of apostles, which lived on in this Rule, was the spiritual ideal of the reforming movements of the century. St. Augustine had exhorted his brethren to "live in harmony together and to be one heart and one soul in God". The monk was to live in obedience, chastity and poverty. In the spirit of this church father, who had himself been a monk before the community of Hippo in North Africa raised him to the degree of bishop, the Dominicans also chose the life of a mendicant order. In the monastic communities of the time it was usual for the individual to be poor although the order had possessions; in the mendicant orders the community was also to be without possessions and to be dependent upon charitable gifts. The Rule of St. Augustine, supplemented by a few rules of other orders, soon ceased to meet the needs of the swiftly growing community. In the year 1228 new rules, the Constitutions, were added. They created a democratic order. Every evening the monks of a Dominican monastery meet in the chapter-room to discuss their communal life and to take decisions. The monastic chapter elects the prior, who remains in office for three years. The master-general of the order is elected for twelve years.

St. Dominic was a nobleman of Castile. The spirit of this Spanish landscape, which is harsh and poor but at the same time bold and clear-cut, is embodied in his Order. The Dominicans made an exact study of Holy Scripture; the thought behind their preaching was clear: they wished to convert the heretic by logical means. In the intellectual discipline of Castile they took upon themselves the learning of the Christians, the Arabs and the ancient Greeks and erected upon it the remarkable philosophical edifice of Scholasticism.

The Dominicans created no new rules. Nor did they evolve a new type of monastery; rather they simplified the types of building common in the 13th century and cut them down to essentials. These were served by a functional architecture, which, as regards the churches, had a character of its own. When built as churches for mendicant orders, the basilica and the hall-church were simplified but they were also planned as a consistent unity, easily taken in at a glance. They provided space for the large congregations for which the orders preached.

The Constitutions of the Dominicans laid down rules which also governed the building of monasteries. The architect was to be an experienced layman, while a monk expounded the spatial programme of the order. The monks of La Tourette kept to this rule. They asked for a church and oratory, a chapter-room and refectory, a cloister, a library, lecture-rooms and cells. They left the shape and planning of the space to Le Corbusier. He was also free to arrange the rooms differently from usual. The site in any case called for this: the steep slope was not a suitable position for a group of two-storied buildings.

Le Corbusier selected the ancient ground-plan of the rectangle surrounding an inner courtyard. Three wings are taken up by the monastery, the church occupies the fourth. We come upon the Dominican college at the top of the slope. The east wing confronting us has three stories. On the ground floor there is a roofed platform. From this platform rise five round-walled pavilions. One is used by the monastery porter, the others constitute the parlatorium: they are rooms in which inmates may talk to strangers, who are not permitted to enter the rooms of the monastery. The entrance-floor is devoted to study. In its three wings there are lecture-rooms, a library, reading-rooms and an oratory. The two upper stories house the Dominicans' cells. In two of the wings the entrance-floor is in fact the ground floor, but in the south wing it becomes one of the upper floors. Here Le Corbusier has used the depth provided by the downward slope of the hillside for two extra floors. The south wing thus contains five stories. Below the lecture-rooms it houses the chapter-room and the refectory and below that again the kitchen. The church is built on two levels. In the lower church are a series of altars at which the monks celebrate mass silently for

themselves every morning while the upper church broadens out for use for choral services and communal mass. A spacious and complex cloister lies between the church and the monastery wings.

The visitor who climbs up to La Tourette by the paths from the village of Eveux-sur-l'Arbresle encounters a building which his historically trained eye takes for anything but a monastery. His unprepared gaze is met by a monolithic block of concrete, at the base of which are threatening concrete
21 tubes like gun-barrels. Then comes a building in the ground-floor of which are narrow slits resembling
22 loopholes for shooting. In the upper floors there are rectangular openings in which the shadow lies
26 darkly as in empty honeycombs. In the inner courtyard stands a pyramid resembling a tomb of Napoleon's time. The observer who conjures up the traditional image of a monastery before his mind's eye finds nothing in its accustomed form or in its usual place. What has happened? Has there been a conflict between space and form, between the external and the internal? Has Le Corbusier disregarded the basic law of building, according to which form must obey function?

Architecture begins with man. His relationships with his fellow men, the suprapersonal, corporate forms which he creates in conjunction with them and their position in relation to God—all this is embodied by the architect and his means. The result is a fruitful reciprocity. The grounds for the architectonic plan are found in the life and combined ideas of the men whom the building is intended to serve. Once it has been realised, the architecture strengthens and confirms the men and their basic communal institutions and helps them to find themselves. Throughout his life Le Corbusier was concerned to place man in this sense at the centre of the architectonic scheme. He derived the inspiration for this in his early years from the architecture of the Carthusian monastery at Ema. It speaks for the "logic of history" that in his old age the master was given the opportunity to put his thoughts about the problem into effect by building a monastery.

For Le Corbusier it was a matter of course that he should build the monastic college of La Tourette in the same forms which he had demonstrated to the world in the tall apartment blocks of Marseille, Nantes and Berlin, in the pilgrimage chapel of Ronchamp and in the new Indian city of Chandigarh. He used brute concrete, which he preferred to all other building materials. He arranged the rooms required by the monastery in a new way according to his beliefs. The result is no arbitrary piece of architecture. The building serves its purposes to perfection. It fulfils the sense of the early Christian monastic Rule of St. Augustine and of the Constitutions. The patterns and arrangements of the traditional monastery reappear in a new form and the inner images which underly the old spatial conceptions are brought to light again.

The monastery gate is in the traditional position next to the church. Here also, as in the Middle Ages, is the area in which the monks may talk to visitors. But how they have changed! The gateway now consists only of the walls and the lintel. They are cast in concrete and form a free-standing frame in space. 23 Is it intended to mock the visitor? To disconcert him? The monastery does not at this point need a door with lock and bolt; but a sign to halt the stranger and to remind him of the dignity of the place towards which his steps are bending would be in order. Le Corbusier erected this sign. Not only does the frame slacken the visitor's pace and exhort him, it also welcomes him. The gateway arch was the original of the triumphal arch. The four cells for conversation answer the purpose better than one large area, in which each conversation disturbs the others. The form and the position correspond to the sense of the parlatorium. The rounded walls with their small lights give the effect of being temporary, an effect which is heightened by the areas which they enclose. A circular bench runs round the wall, its upholstery providing 24 scant comfort. The roughcast wall serves as a back. The wall is pierced by rectangular lights. There is a 25 narrow light between the wall and the ceiling. Simplified versions of designs used in the chapel of Ronchamp reappear in this tent-like functional area. Their position on the open ground-floor makes it clear that the cells are not part of the monastery: in this parlatorium the world has pitched its impermanent tents before the monastery gates.

The parlatorium is on the floor used for study. Next to it in the adjoining east wing is a common-room for the lay brothers. The common-room for the student brothers has a larger floor area. Adjacent to it is an oratory. The first paragraph of the third chapter of the Rule of St. Augustine says: "In the oratory 27 or house of prayer no one shall do anything other than the purpose for which it is there, and from which also it takes its name, so that those who think they have to do something else there do not disturb those who wish also to pray outside the prescribed hours, in their free time". Le Corbusier did not hide the oratory away in an unused corner. He made it a small house of prayer and gave it a position in the architecture of the courtyard commensurate with the importance of private prayer in the life of the Order. In building it he carried out the precept of the Rule. In this house of prayer nobody can "do anything other than the purpose for which it is there". The cubiform space, resting on a cross-shaped support and given extra height by a pyramidal roof, concentrates the mind of the young Dominican on his devotions. The dark box, more brightly illuminated above by the light shaft in the roof, also represents the situation of the solitary worshipper who cries to the Lord from out of the depths.

The library occupies the remaining part of the east wing and the first half of the south wing. Le Corbusier has laid it out according to the ground-plan of his residential units in the apartment block in Mar-

seille: a single-storied area is followed by a section which rises through two stories. When a reader in the library changes his place, he can step from an intimate, low room into a high, liberating one. A change of spatial feeling, which can usually be experienced only by going out of the house, here becomes possible inside a reading-room.

27 The common-room and library open only on to the courtyard. The walls facing the courtyard are trans-
28 parent and are made of concrete frames and glass panels. Rectangular panels of concrete placed here and there create variety in the diaphanous chess-board and a play of shadow within. At the end of the library the narrow passage changes its position. Up to this point it has run along the outside wall, lit by horizontal band-like openings. Past the small staircase that lies at the head-end of the library, it follows
29 the glass wall of the courtyard. In the second part of the south wing and in the west wing it leads to the lecture-rooms, to a second common-room for the student brothers and to the common-room for the
31 fathers who act as teachers in the college. These rooms give on to the open country; their exterior wall is made of "undulatory" glass.

32 A circular stairway enters the courtyard in front of the west wing. The spiral stairs lead to the two
33, 41 lower floors which this wing contains. On the first of these floors it leads to the atrium which precedes the cloister and gives access to the chapter-room and refectory. It was possible for Le Corbusier to plan the chapter-room on a relatively small scale since the student brothers are not yet members of the monastery chapter; in the refectory, however, the whole monastic community had to be brought together in brotherhood for meals. Le Corbusier retained the traditional model of the three-aisled hall. The circular concrete supports rise as simply as did those pillars which in the medieval churches of the mendicant orders took the place of extravagant clustered columns. They carry powerful concrete beams on which the flat ceiling rests. The refectory is the festive room of the monastery. For this reason Le
34 Corbusier gave it more light than he gave the other rooms. It has a chequered glass wall on to the courtyard; in the direction of the outside world the undulatory glass permits a splendid distant view of the hills beyond which ripens the Beaujolais wine placed on the monks' tables at meal-times. In spite of its traditional aspect there is nothing medieval about the room. Although modern in structure and material, the
35 room is rather more early Christian in appearance. This refectory makes it easy to observe the fourth chapter of the Rule of St. Augustine: "When you go to table, until you stand up again, listen to the regular reading without sound and without dispute; for you shall take in nourishment not only through your mouth, but your ears also shall be hungry for the word of God". From the atrium, the spiral staircase leads down

to the bottom floor of the west wing, where the kitchen, the laundry and other domestic services have functional and airy rooms. 37

The medieval monastery building was created out of the necessities of the life of the order; its architectural forms were evolved from ancient models. The cloister had to provide covered ways between the monastery buildings; but it was also a place for leisure and for private prayer. The peristyle which surrounded the four sides of the inner courtyard of Roman houses was available to meet these needs. The cloister derived therefrom leant against the wall of the monastery, while the other long wall was pierced by arcades or pillared windows. Le Corbusier abandoned the type and the model but enhanced the functional quality of the communicating way. His cloister has side walls made of undulatory glass and the monks can use it in all weathers. At the threshold of the chapter-room it widens and increases in height to become the atrium, such as had also developed at this point in the medieval cloister. Le Corbusier shortened the passages. The cloister cuts through the square of the courtyard, linking the monastery wings and the church along the shortest line. For serving the monastic regulations with such correctness and exactitude the architect was rewarded by a new form. The cloister (Kreuzgang) of La Tourette in its courtyard does in fact take the shape of a cross (Kreuz); here, for the first time in the history of the Christian monastery, the inner form of the architectural conception has been embodied. 38 39, 40 41 42

The monk does not live an exclusively communal life. The Rule lays down that Dominicans shall at certain hours be solitary. A man desiring to compose his mind, to meditate and study must have a closed room to himself. This the monk finds in his cell. Le Corbusier set aside the two upper stories of the three wings for the hundred cells of La Tourette. Each cell contains space only for a table, book-shelves, a cupboard and a bed. It is functionally enlarged by a washing recess. A loggia leads into the fresh air and also serves as a "brise-soleil". The cells are so arranged that each one has sunshine during the course of the day. Le Corbusier handled the sunlight with caution. He provided the passages of the upper floors with narrow, horizontal band-like lights and allowed daylight to enter the cells only indirectly, via the loggia. The cells of La Tourette are a combination of the hermitages of La Sainte-Baume and the back rooms of the residential units in Marseille. The cells are small but, in spite of this, they permit the monk to breathe freely — and that not only in the loggia. He also has space around him between the brute concrete walls. The boon of the Modulor, the system of proportions developed by Le Corbusier from the measurements of the human body, which is today a basic rule of his buildings, has a liberating effect in these small rooms. The cell possesses something of the quality which a properly cut garment gives to the body. A reflection of the inner image inherent in its name, which derives from the area dedicated to 43 44 45

the divinity in a Greek temple, falls on these bare walls. It has a greater quality of space than have the common-rooms. In this space a man may compose his mind, rest, meditate and study; it stimulates him as a person and confirms him in his powers.

The conceptions and laws which underlie the monastery buildings are intensified and clarified in the church. In building the church, consideration had again to be given to both the individual and the community. The monks read mass silently to themselves every morning. For this each requires an altar. Le Corbusier might have placed these altars in side-chapels. That would, however, have demanded an architectonic ostentation alien to the sense of a church of a mendicant order. Should he place portable altars somewhere? Altars erected haphazardly are contrary to the dignity belonging to the central point of Christian worship. Le Corbusier chose fixed altars and assigned a lower church to them. This lies on the north side of the church. An undulating outer wall brings movement into the area. This is interrupted by the flat ceiling and straight walls between the lower and upper churches. The walls are painted red and yellow; the ceiling is blue. The round openings of telescopes in the ceiling bring in the daylight and shine like suns. The walls of their barrels colour it white, red and black. The floor rises in broad platforms, the surface of which is covered with modern cobbling made of the largest round stones of moraine gravel embedded in cement. An altar in the form of a block and table rises from each of the six platforms. The Christian sees the altar as the high place where the earth arches up towards heaven. Christ in the sacrament descends on to the altar. We have seen no altar in contemporary architecture in which this inner image is so simply, exactly and grandly embodied as it is in the altars of La Tourette. They are the high places of the drama of Golgotha. 55, 56 49 50

The architect uses images which are intended to be taken seriously. When architects began to see the body of a church as a nave (from Latin "navis" = ship) they had in mind real ships which sail on rivers and oceans. The architect who today sets his mind against such images divorces building from the other manifestations of the time and kills it by isolation. Le Corbusier did not know this fear. He called the telescopes light guns. If the body of a 13th century church of a mendicant order was a ship, the lower church of La Tourette is a submarine. She has sunk out of the world, the light of which only reaches her from far away and transformed by the telescopes. Or is it a bunker on the edge of the world? Whichever image we like to accept, this is what the crucial places, where the mystery is guarded, look like. The lower church is the innermost domain of the monastery; here, every morning, as mass is celebrated in silence, hope rises afresh. 55 56

The familiar nave, however, is not far away. It awaits us in the upper church. Le Corbusier designed it in the form of the long-shaped hall beloved of the mendicant orders of the Middle Ages. He was able to keep it small, for the monastic community numbers at most a hundred heads; nor will the lay congregation, to whom the church is open, be large in this remote locality. Nevertheless, the situation requires the architect to bring two different liturgical communities into relationship with one altar. To this end he chose the christological type of the wayside church: Christ, that is the altar, rises at the centre of the long rectangle; the monks make their way towards it from the west, the lay people from the east. The tabernacle does not stand upon the altar; its place is in a sacramentary chapel in the north wall. This is in accordance with the rules by which the tabernacle is not permitted to rest on the high altar of episcopal or monastic churches.

Concrete walls rise from this ground-plan to form an austere box-shaped space closed by a flat ceiling. The space is divided crosswise by five steps. The rear, lower, half has rows of benches arranged longways. In its short wall there is a recess for an organ. In the higher forepart of the church the high altar rises in the form of a table on a rectangular island. Next to it stands the altar cross, without the body of Christ, formed from two iron rods. To the south of the altar there is an opening in the wall. There, behind a screen, lies the sacristy, a box-shaped room lit by light guns. To the north of the altar the wall opens on to a side chapel. It juts into the upper area of the lower church and is warmed by the coloured light of its telescopes. In this chapel stands the sacramental altar. The mystery of the deep is linked with the nave, where, through its services, the monastery throws itself open to the world. Of all the rooms, it is only the upper church to which the layman has free access. The door for his use opens on the short east side.

Le Corbusier allowed the church little light, but he apportioned it with care. The rear part has narrow horizontal windows; they are situated above the benches and give the monks praying there a good light by which to read. Between the short wall and the roof there is a band of light. The roof is pierced by a rectangular light and this is shared by the other half of the room. It is intensified by the coloured reflection that filters in from the sacramental chapel and by a light-giving slit between the short east and the long south walls. Although the sources of light are few, the church does not appear dark. The dim light increases the power of the unsurfaced concrete and the space broadens into the hall of the Lord, where the whole monastery joins in choral services and corporate mass. It obeys the law of Christian church building, which excludes wild nature and concentrates upon the altar. In the monks' part of the church red, green and yellow light strikes through the slits. On the short east wall the confessional glows red.

These are the only colours in the church. No ornament or images adorn it. At mass and during the choral service we do not miss them, for then the monks in their white and black garments fill the room with figures and images. It seems to require no symbol other than that of the man who believes that he was created in the likeness of God.

Having thus made his way through the Dominican college, the visitor who looks again at the exterior appearance of La Tourette recognises that the forms which at first seemed strange to him have a purpose and meaning. He notices that the exterior is a reflection of the function and arrangement of the different parts of the building. Interior images are confirmed in the exterior appearance. In the east wing the ground floor acts as a socle for the jutting cell floors. Horizontal slit lights suffice here since the corridor runs along the exterior wall. The observer is confronted by the blank wall of the adjacent corner of the south wing; behind it lies the library area which rises through two stories and has its window wall facing the courtyard. Towards the west the wing seems to become freer and more open with every step. "Pilotis" raise it above the downhill slope of the land; at the west corner the outer walls of the lecture-rooms are transformed into undulatory glass and on the upper floors the cells once again claim their place. The five stories of the west wing are entirely opened up by undulatory glass and loggias. The kitchen, refectory, lecture-rooms and cells afford an open view on to the countryside. An area of wall at the south corner and the blank wall of the church give the sides of the bold structure of glass and air the optical support of a frame. The recess which is to house the organ protrudes from the church wall. High above it we can make out the slit which gives light inside between the wall and the roof. To the north lies the lower church, like indeed to a submarine against the high wall of the nave, its three light guns like telescopes following the path of the sun.

In place of towers the mendicant orders in the Middle Ages gave their churches a turret known as a ridge-turret which sat upon the ridge of the roof. Le Corbusier extended the short east wall of the church upwards by a triangular wall which he supported by a second rising from the north wall, the two forming a right-angle. They carry a concrete box which is open on two sides and in which hang the bells. Le Corbusier used the simplest possible means to construct a support for the bells and at the same time gave a visible representation of the inner image inherent in the ridge-turret.

When we look into the courtyard now, we recognise that the pyramid is the oratory; we see that the cloister (Kreuzgang) does in fact lie like a cross (Kreuz) in the open square and we know why its roof rises in the form of a three-cornered prism in front of the west wing: that is where the atrium lies. We are no longer disconcerted by the two upper stories, the walls of which open on to the courtyard only in

horizontal slits. We know that behind them are the corridors of the cells, the loggias of which face outwards. The lower round tower in front of the west wing is familiar to us as the one which houses the staircase, while we recognise the tall one in the space between the west wing and the church as the monastery chimney. 27, 44

Viewing the building as a whole, we can grasp that the external form corresponds to the inner space and its function. The effects which at first sight appeared to have failed to come off are now shown to be indispensable. All the same, we are witnessing a great venture. It begins with the materials. Unsur- 46
faced poured concrete alternates on the walls with roughcast areas which come from a spray-gun. 57

The great framework which encloses the loggias of cell floors is made of concrete which contains flint pebbles instead of sand. The play begun by the solid surfaces above is continued spatially by the grilles and the dark-shadowed rectangles of the loggias and transparently by the glass walls. The basic patterns 32
of modern painting and the contours of the new sculpture give it a heightened form. These make an unobtrusive appearance on the outside walls but are unmistakable in the courtyard. Designs such as 22, 27
are used in geometrically orientated non-objective painting are incorporated into the loggia wall of the cell floors, the round walls of the parlatorium and of the staircase tower and, especially, the glass walls 33
formed of transparent and solid rectangles. Even the square head of the ventilating shaft on the roof of 32
the west wing is pierced in a bold composition made up of squares and rectangles. 64

These elementary designs of painting do not remain on the surface; they penetrate transparently and spatially in depth and acquire a plastic effect. The voice of sculpture is clear in the round tents of the 24
parlatorium, in the staircase tower and the chimney, the pyramid of the oratory, the lower church and the 32, 46
ridge-turret. Their forms are similar to those of the non-representational sculpture of today which re- 27, 63
sembles pieces of apparatus. The painting and sculpture, however, are not non-functional: they are integrated with the architecture. In the harmony which results the monastery rooms unfold openly and 46
with a free movement, the different parts of the building concurring in that "confrontation of bodies, 47
which gives rise to movement" to use Rodin's words. In the chapel of Ronchamp, Le Corbusier created a freely moving, aperspective architecture in the unity of a single area and a single architectural body; the different problems of La Tourette obliged him to present his architectural image in a sequence of 66, 67
spatial units and architectural bodies. The effect is more restrained and austere than at Ronchamp. The distinction between a pilgrimage, which is an event of popular devotion, and the ascetic life of a community of monks is revealed in the architecture.

In spite of the diversity of parts and forms of the building, the effect of La Tourette is homogeneous

and monumental. At every epoch of monastic building master-builders and architects have endeavoured to concentrate buildings and spaces and weld monastery and church into a single group. It was not only by means of the short passages of the cloister, the narrow corridors and stairways that Le 66
Corbusier met this requirement. Out of the multiplicity of different kinds of room he formed a compact whole. The building is open to the forces of the landscape but as a man-made structure it stands aloof from the fields and forests of nature. The overall aspect of La Tourette stands in contrast to nature, emphasising the frontiers which separate the sacred precincts from the world. In its details Le Corbusier abandoned the conception of the claustrum but in general terms he restated his own basic ideas about the closed precinct.

The Dominican college of Sainte-Marie de la Tourette came into existence in a creative harmony of purpose and meaning, tradition and new ideas, function and form, architecture and pictorial art. The memorable fruit of this process is a new physical type of Christian monastery.

Historians of the monastic communities praise the Rule of St. Augustine, which forms the basis of the Dominican canon, for its broadmindedness. It lays stress upon the fundamental laws but allows considerable play in individual precepts. It thus meets the requirements both of the community and of the individual. Monastic life can also be brought into line with the contingencies of place and time. This happened in the choice of the site for La Tourette. The Dominicans of Lyon did not wish to build an ordinary monastery: this one was to be a college in which novices spend seven years studying philosophy and theology. Novices have as yet no mission in the world and it was thus unnecessary to build this monastery in the city. A solitary situation in the open countryside would be more advantageous to study. Leafy 58
trees, pines and a pond frame the monastery buildings; the grass of the nearby meadows grows in soil 62
strewn upon its flat concrete roofs. In spite of this, the building forms a clear contrast with the organic 65
nature surrounding it. It is conceived in relation to distance. In distance it takes on a significant relationship with the earth, the sun and the clouds. Are monastery and landscape here taking up afresh the great dialogue which they began with the early monastic buildings of the Benedictines? Many of the monasteries of the Carolingian and medieval periods are fortified, but they do not keep the deliberate distance from the surrounding countryside observable at La Tourette. This attitude is inspired by Mannerism. The typical Mannerist buildings, the Villa Monte Imperiale near Pesaro and the summer palace of Caprarola in north Latium, form as sharp a contrast with the immediate countryside as does La Tourette, and are equally magnificently related to the distant landscape. Are those critics justified who regard the monastery of La Tourette as a Mannerist building?

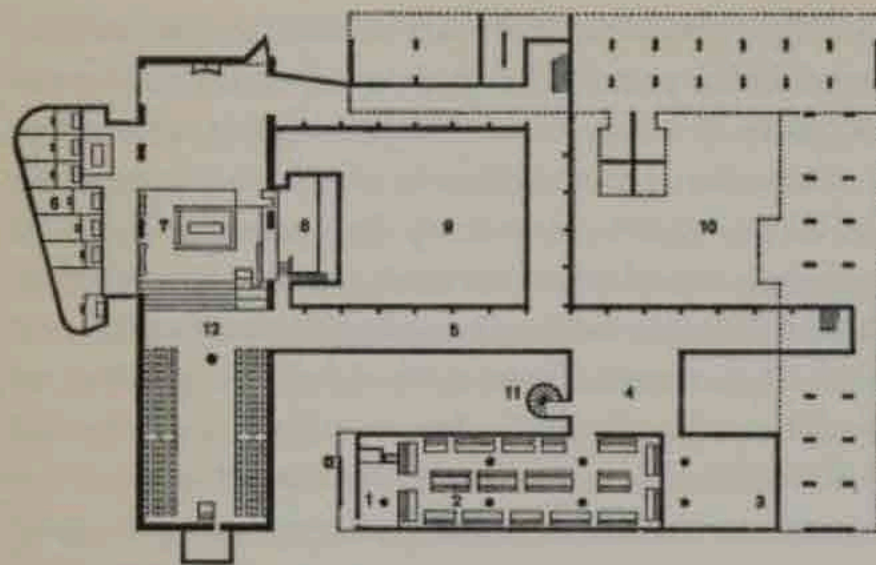
We give the name Mannerism to the style which reigned in Europe from about 1520 to 1600. It has not so far been as thoroughly studied as have other manifestations of western art; the history of architecture has, however, recognised a number of its characteristics. There is a surprise in store for us when we examine the building of La Tourette in this context. The free-standing, isolated gateway — surprising though it is in its unwontedness — and the closed-off box-form of the church are Mannerist ideas. Also characteristic of the style are the harsh contrasts in the appearance of the walls formed by the undulatory glass, the dark honeycombs of the loggias in front of the cells and the massive concrete walls, and the unreconciled juxtaposition of the architectural units, which is particularly striking in the courtyard. The spiral staircases, the extremely narrow corridors and the ravine-like church are Mannerist. The sudden, harsh irruption of light from above in the oratory, the sacristy and the lower church and the slit lights in the walls of the corridors of the cell stories and in the church occur in similar form in buildings of the 16th century. Mannerists liked to build up the forecourts and gardens of their buildings into terraces. Le Corbusier put the terraces inside his building: the lower west wing has five stories, the upper east wing only three. Mannerist, finally, are the unexpected outward forms and the labyrinthine plan, so difficult for the eye to take in, which invite us to fathom them but reveal their meaning only to the enquirer who explores the suite of rooms one by one.

Although La Tourette reveals Mannerist features, it has nothing to do with the architectural forms and architectonic phenomena of the 16th century. Mannerism is a stylistic attitude which is possible at any time and within any style; the 16th century was alone in providing the favourable historical possibilities which enabled it to become the style of the period. Nor, therefore, will it do to assess the Mannerism of La Tourette as a phenomenon of Le Corbusier's old age. With him it is much more a stylistic attitude which permeates parts of his work at every stage of his creative life. Werner Hager saw Mannerism as a high-tension connection between thought and feeling, between expediency and grace. Le Corbusier lived and worked in the harmony of these opposites.

Even in the affluent 20th century the Dominicans live as a mendicant order. They were unable to pay for the building costs of La Tourette out of monastic funds. The sale of old monastic buildings provided a nucleus; the balance had to be sought from charitable gifts. Le Corbusier's plan was for a building of the simplest construction. The poverty of the Order compelled him to cut down his projects even further. The ceilings and supports of the rooms were not surfaced and were painted in only a few places. Ventilation is by air-slits and these are covered by plywood flaps. The installation is everywhere visible on the room side of the walls and ceilings. In spite of this, the final effect of the rooms is not poor. For

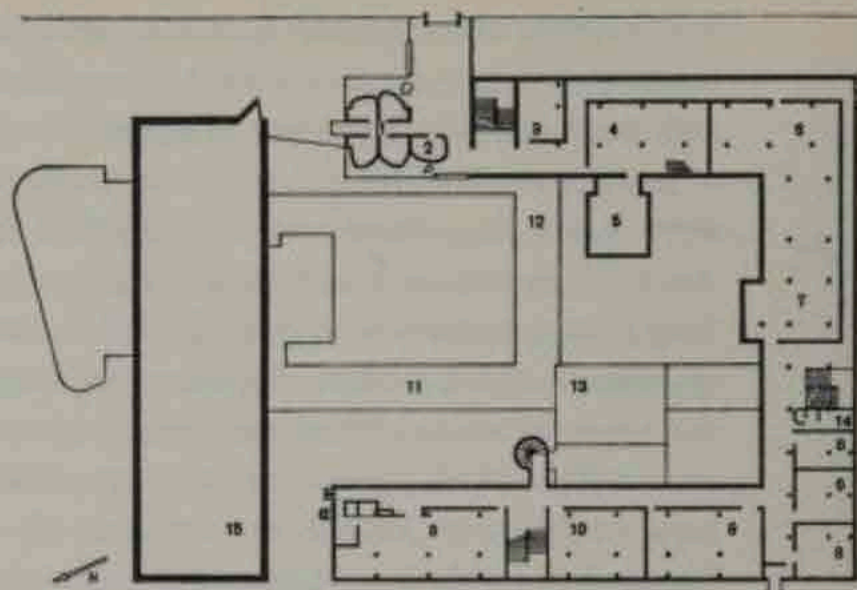
the first time since the 13th and 14th centuries the Dominicans have built a monastery in the architectural style of their origin — that of a mendicant order. In the year 1960 a chapter and an architect were sufficiently bold to embody poverty in the spatial terms of architecture; and, indeed, it is revealed as a "great light from within", as Rilke recognised. Since the basic proportions of the architecture are right, it intrudes neither upon the individual nor upon the monastic community. The sovereign independence of possessions as well as of want, which raises poverty to a spiritual level, produced, on the contrary spatial forms in which the spirit of the Dominican order, as well as its archetype, was, as it were, re-embodied; it is a spirit which can best be conceived as a synthesis of contemplation and action, of the powerful words of the sermons and of ascetic silence. "Le Corbusier knew what we are and what we want", replied the monks when asked whether the monastery fits in with their life. Following the creative path from careful consideration of function via construction to the emerging embodiment of the symbol, Le Corbusier arrived at that point of imaginativeness in spatial terms in which a work of architecture is perfected. It gives man an image of himself and thus access to himself. Having thus liberated him, it leads him to the community in which he feels himself to be richer and of greater significance than as an isolated and solitary person. It interprets the world, discloses its meaning and in the end reflects a reality higher than the earthly.

Many intellectual and formal paths meet in La Tourette. Among the most remarkable must be the road by which Le Corbusier arrived there. His love of monks was well known, but that he should have built his first monastery for the Dominicans is nevertheless one of the surprises of the spirit, which bloweth where it listeth. Le Corbusier came of a family which belonged to the Waldensians. The Waldensians were connected with the Albigenses. They were among the sects of southern France to whom the first Dominicans were sent to preach the old faith. Born in La Chaux-de-Fonds, the Swiss village home of his exiled forefathers, Le Corbusier returned to France. There he built a monastery for the Order from which his ancestors had fled seven hundred years earlier. We do not know whether Le Corbusier retained the Waldensian beliefs of his fathers. His opponents say that he was a nihilist. If so, he was one in the unusual sense described by Gottfried Benn writing after the Second World War: "The coming century will place the world of men under a constraint, confront it with a decision in the face of which there is no evasion and no emigration. It will leave only two types: those who act and aspire and those who wait in silence for the change to come, the historically minded and the profound, criminals and monks — and I plead for the black cowls". While he was building La Tourette Le Corbusier pleaded in this sense for the black (and for the white) cowls.



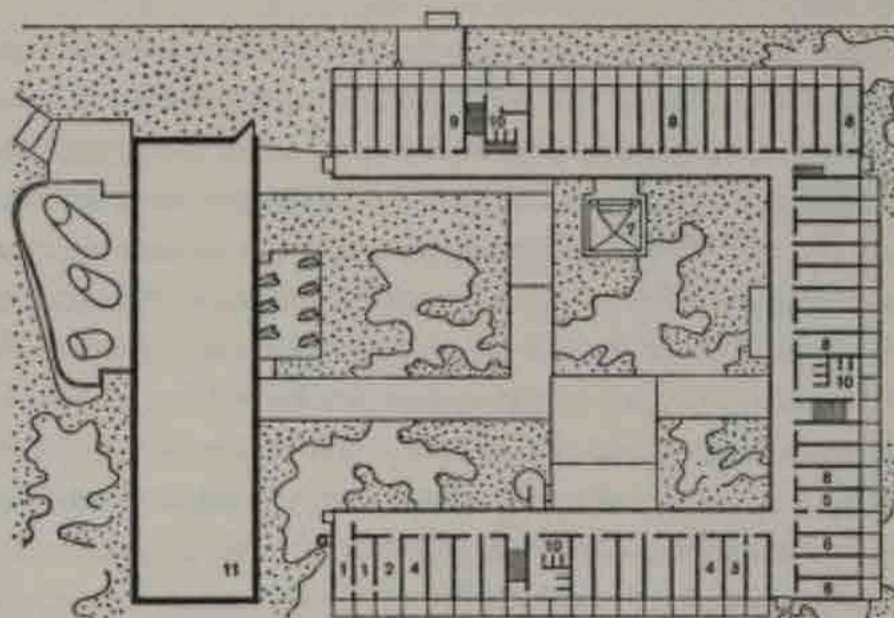
Refectory floor

1 Pantry, 2 Refectory, 3 Chapter-room, 4 Atrium, 5 Cloister, 6 Lower church, 7 High altar, 8 Sacristy, 9, 10 Courtyard, 11 Spiral staircase, 12 Church



Entrance floor

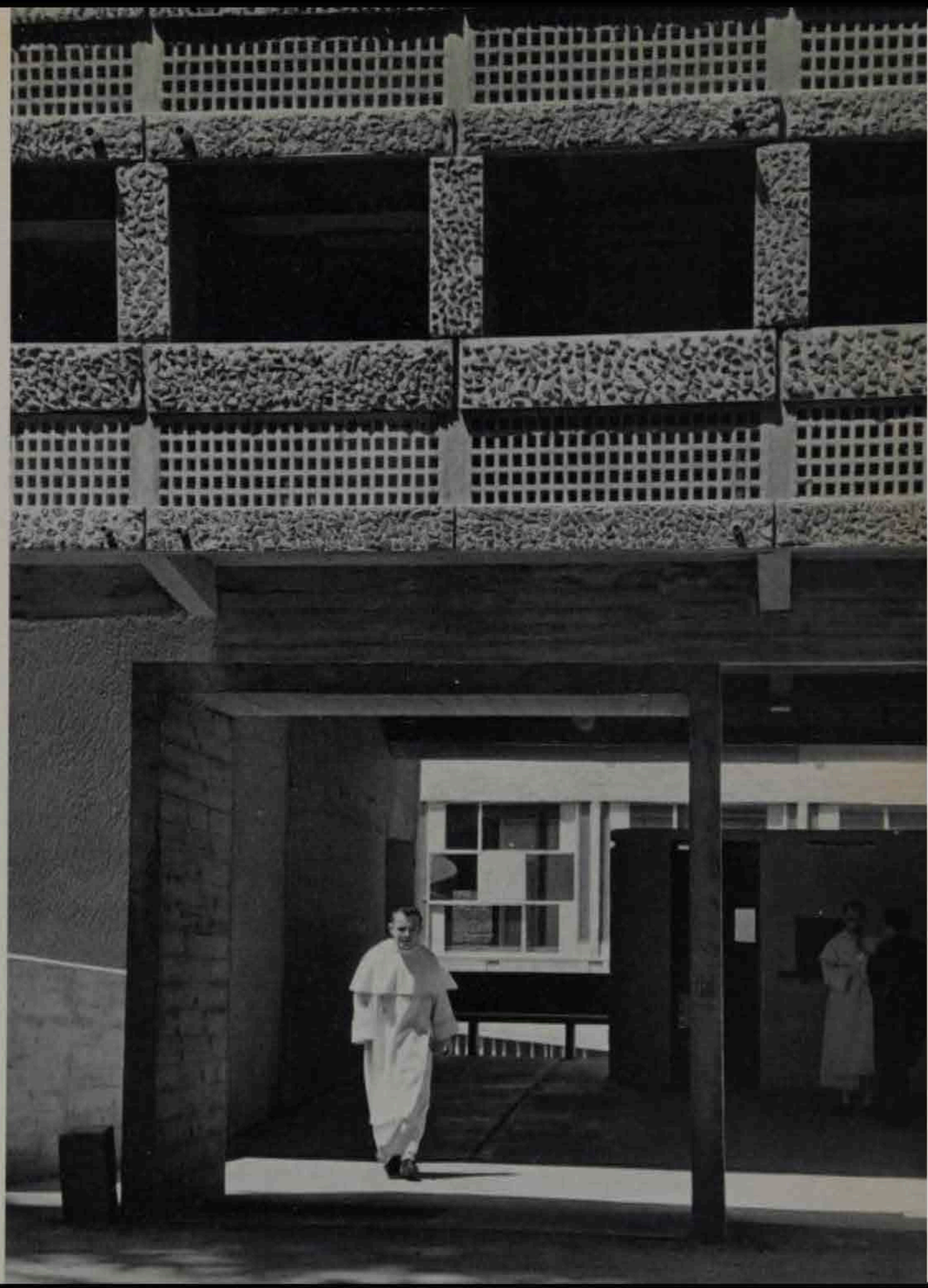
1 Conversation cells, 2 Porter, 3 Room for the lay-brothers, 4 Common-room for the student brothers, 5 Oratory, 6 Reading-room, 7 Library, 8 Lecture rooms, 9 Common-room for the student brothers, 10 Common-room for the fathers, 11, 12 Cloister, 13 Atrium, 14 WC, 15 Church

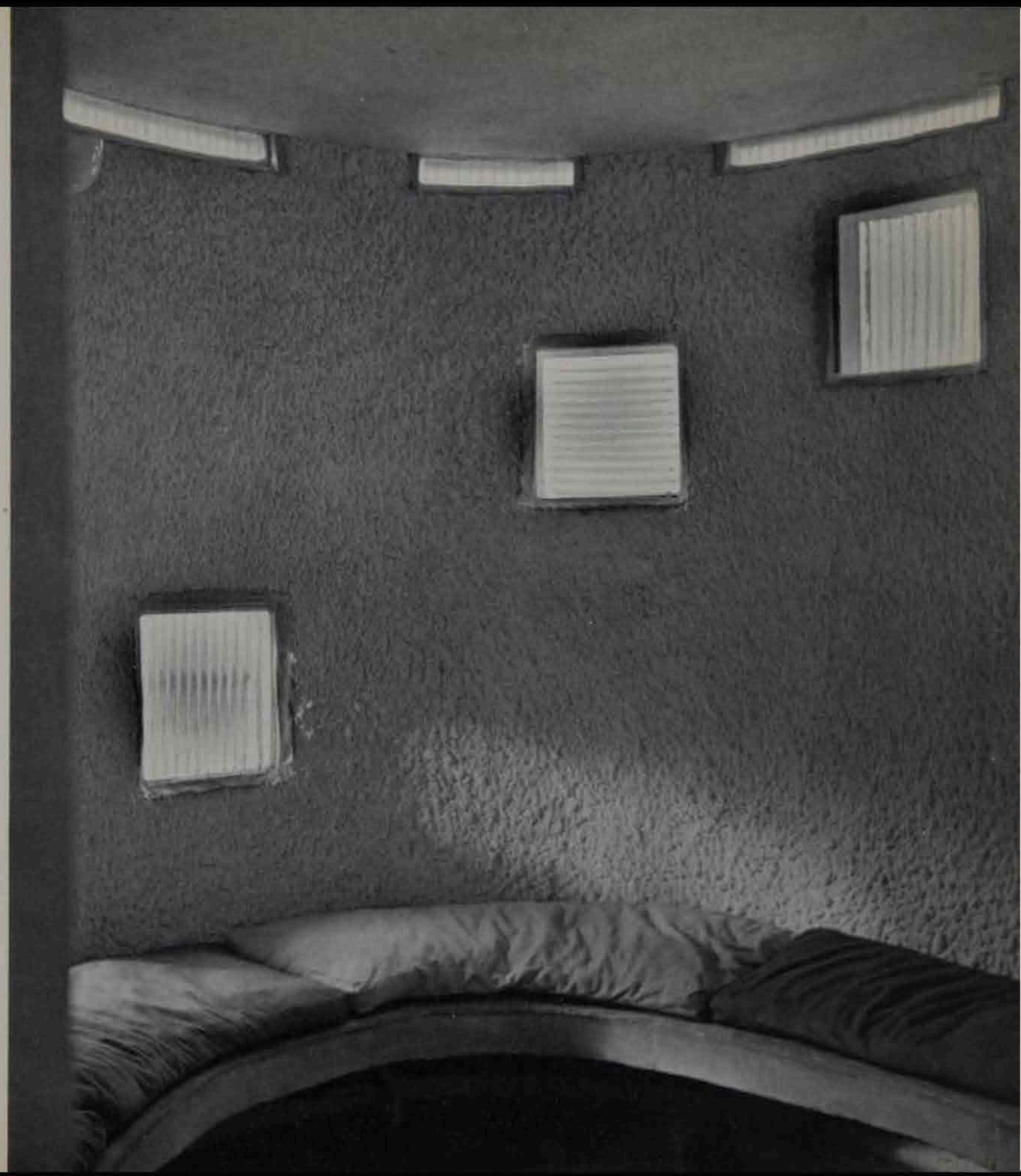
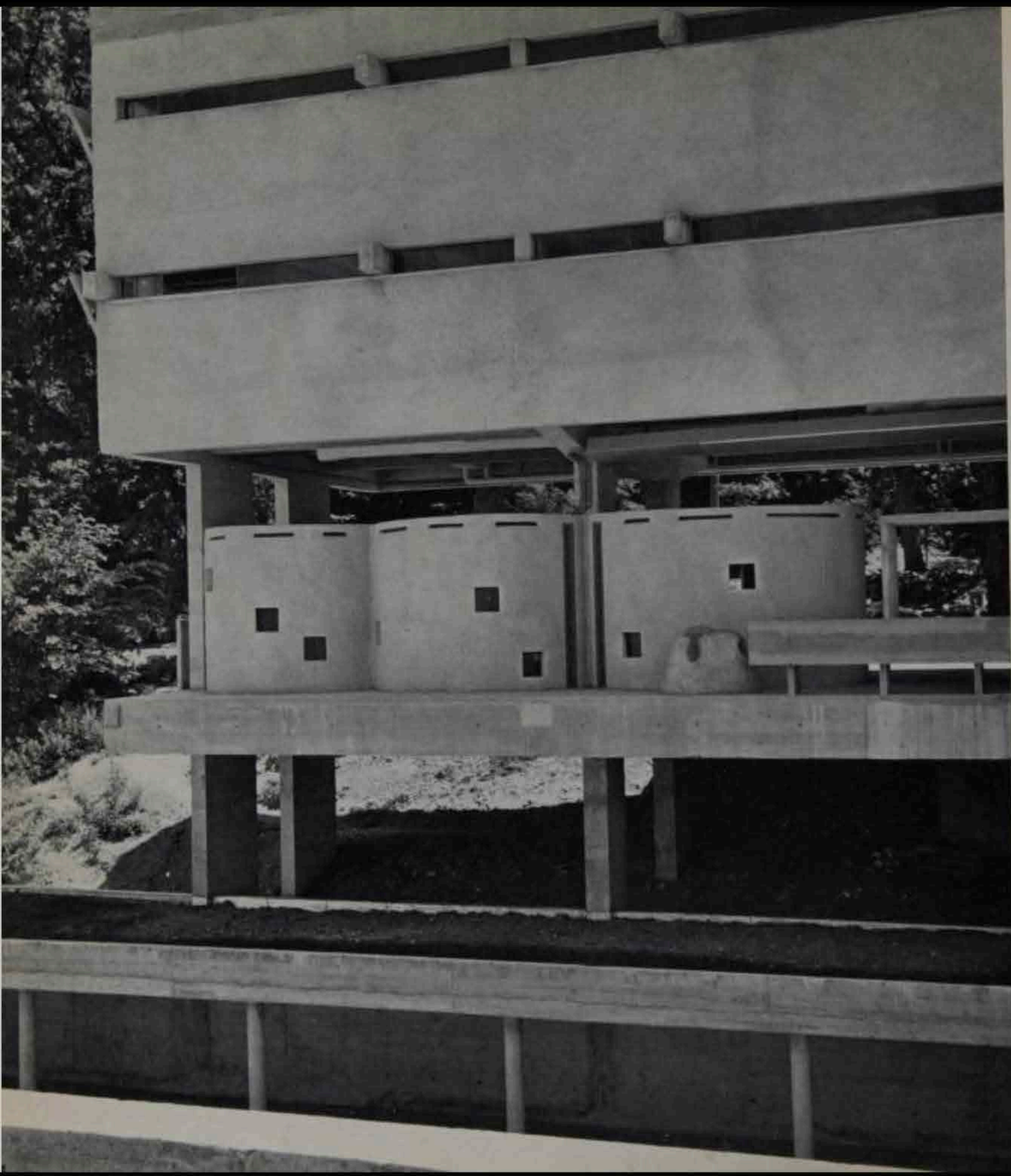


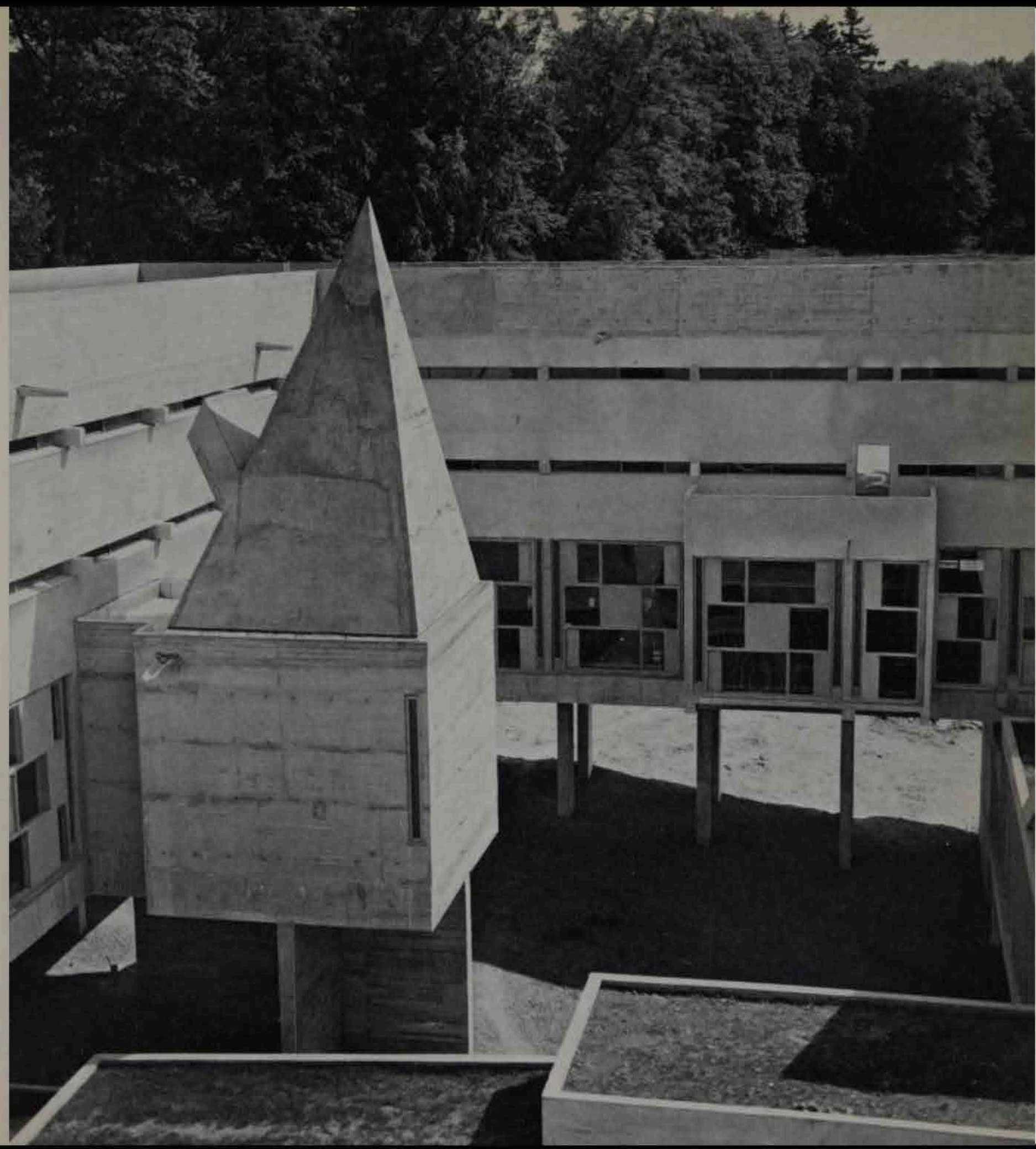
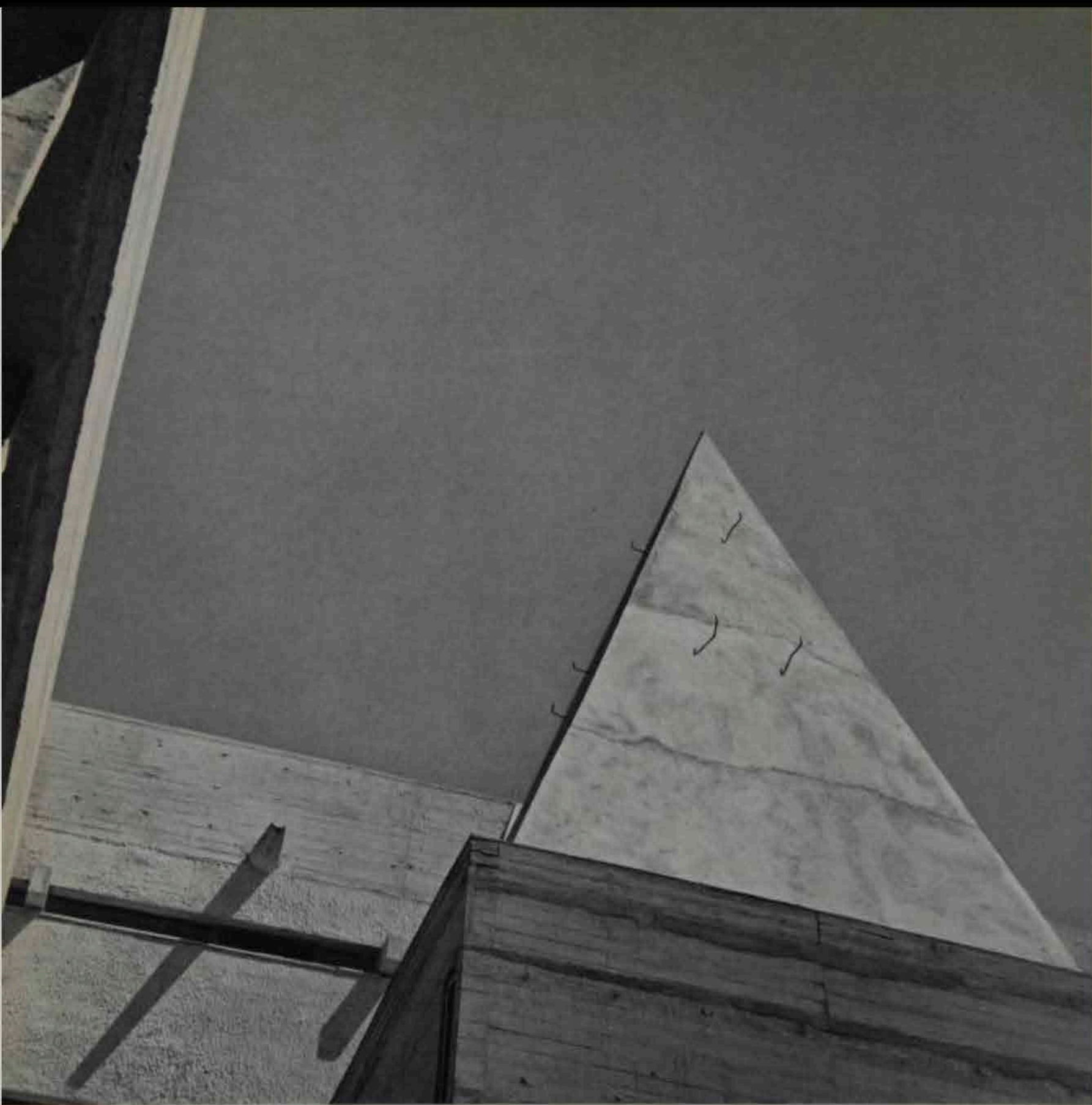
Cell floor

1 Cells for the sick, 2 Nurse's cell, 3 Cells for visitors, 4 Fathers' cells, 5 Cell for the monk in charge of the student brothers, 6 Student priests' cells, 7 Oratory, 8 Student brothers' cells, 9 Lay brothers' cells, 10 Sanitary offices, 11 Church



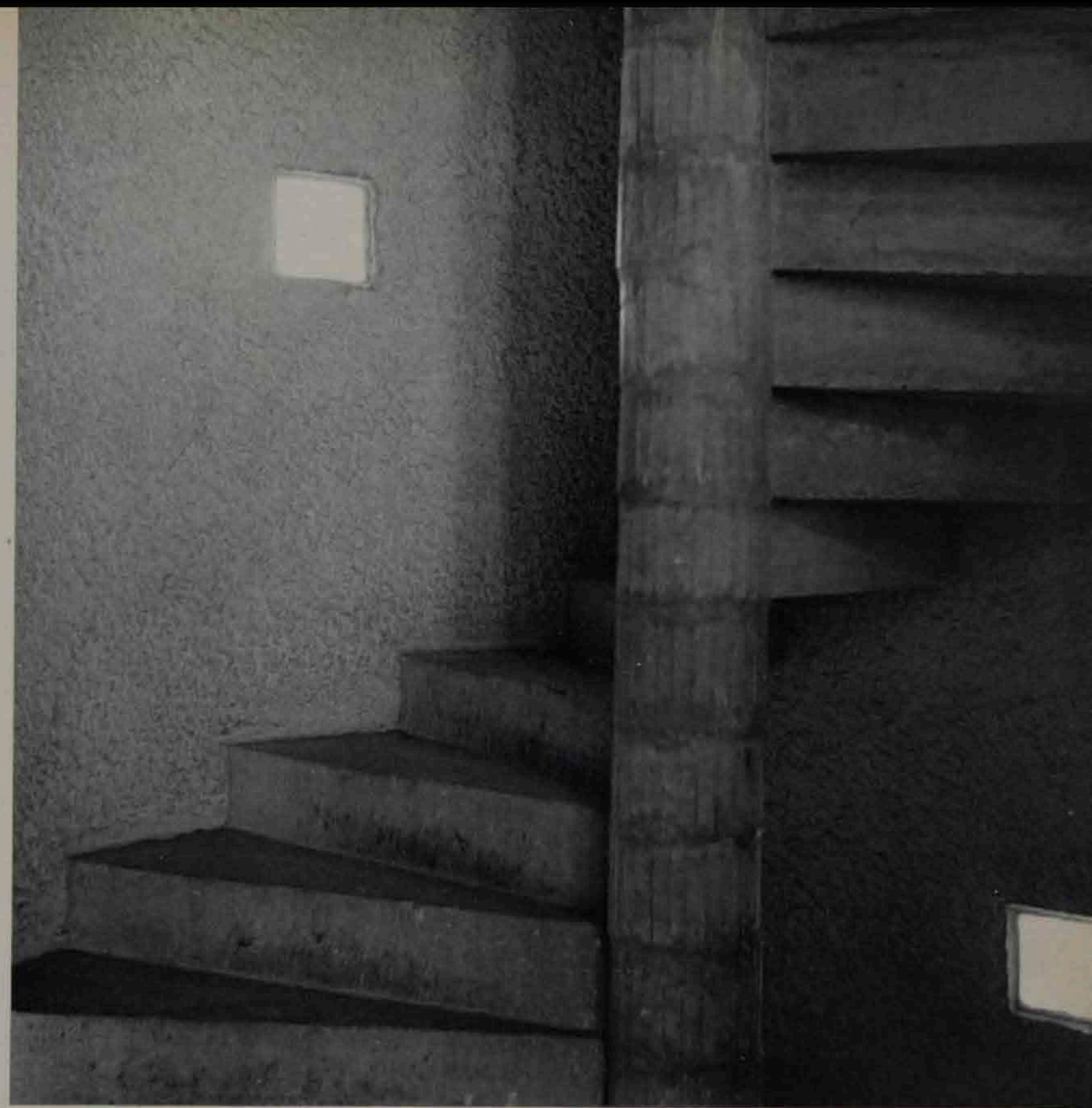
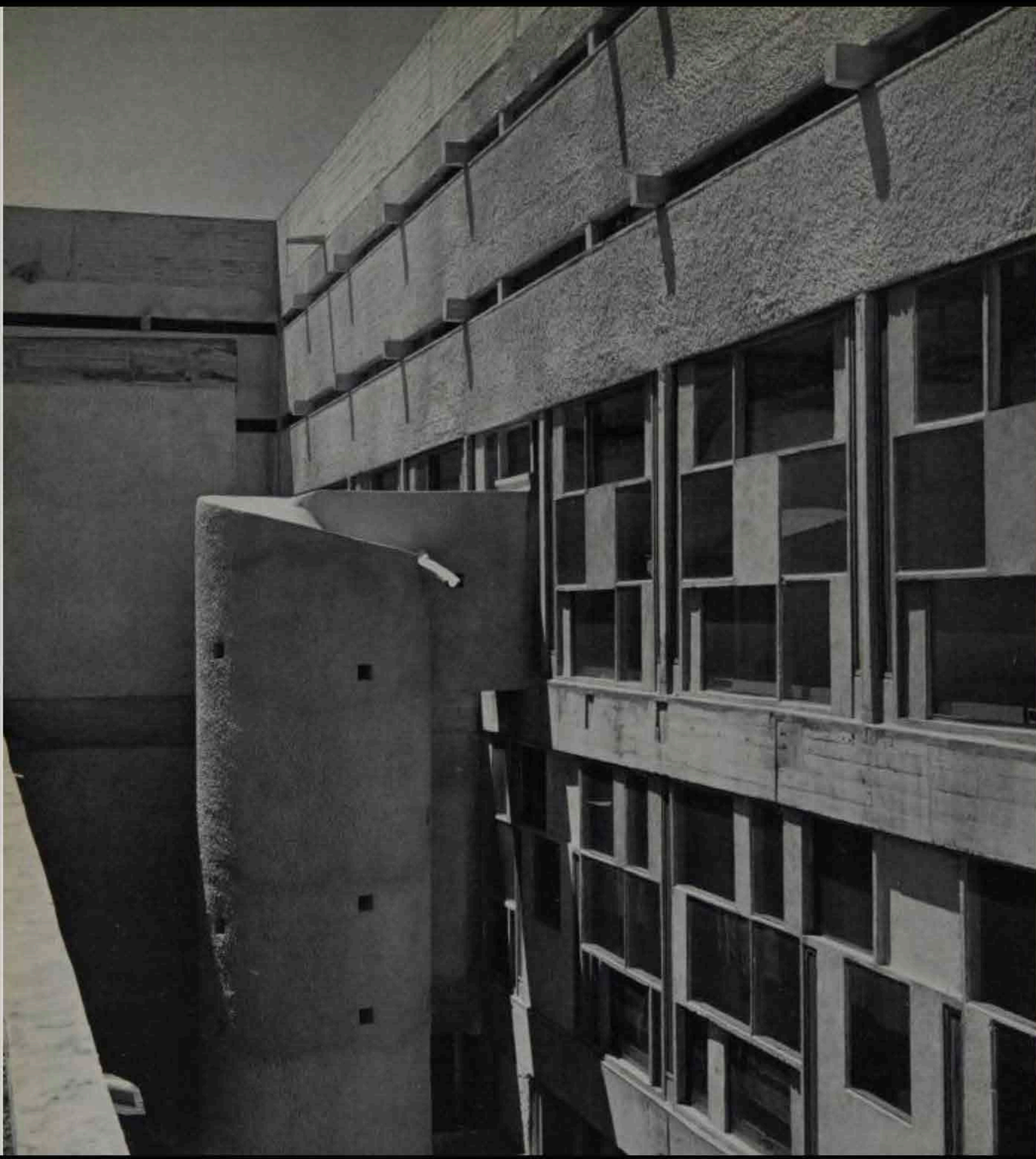










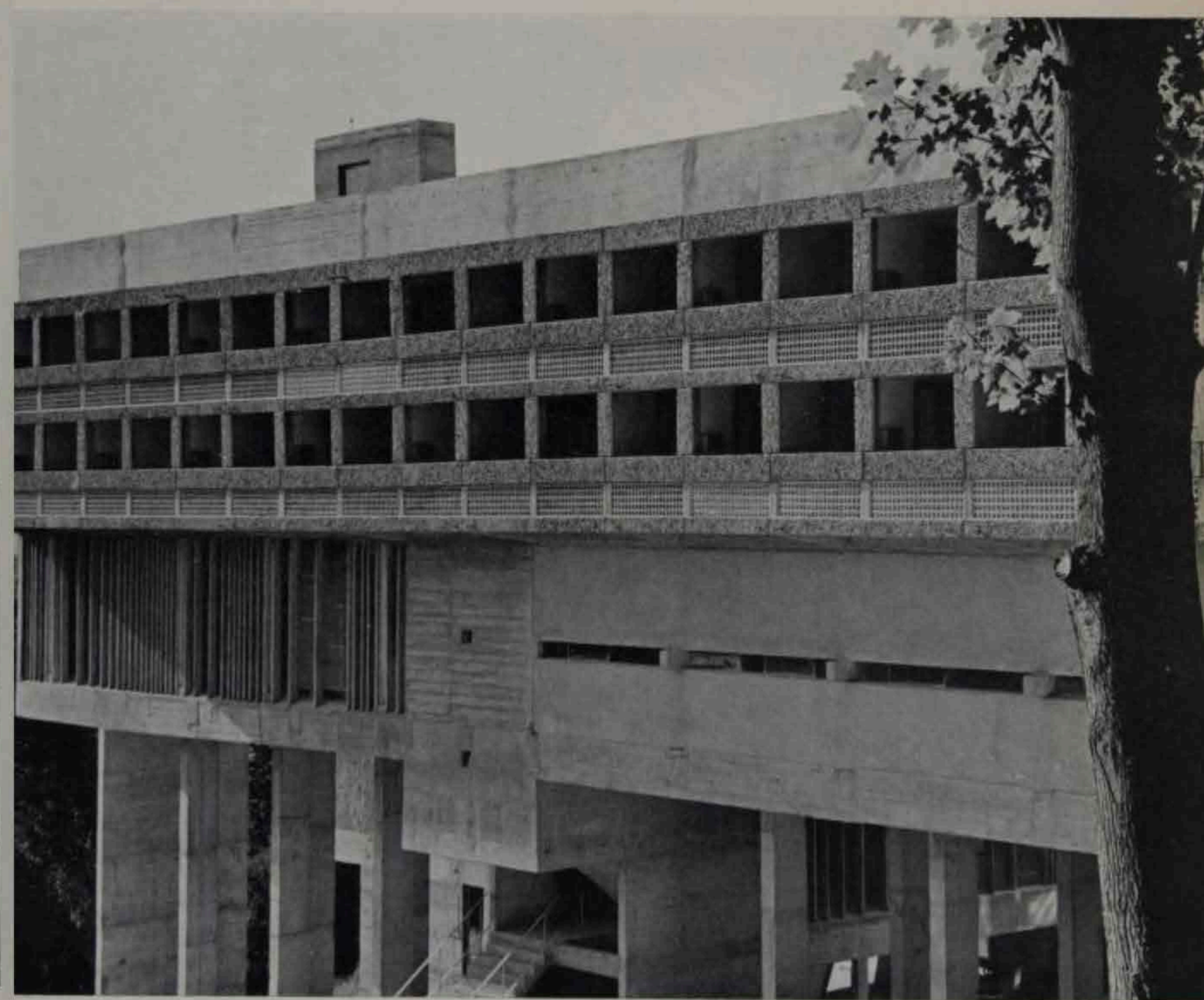




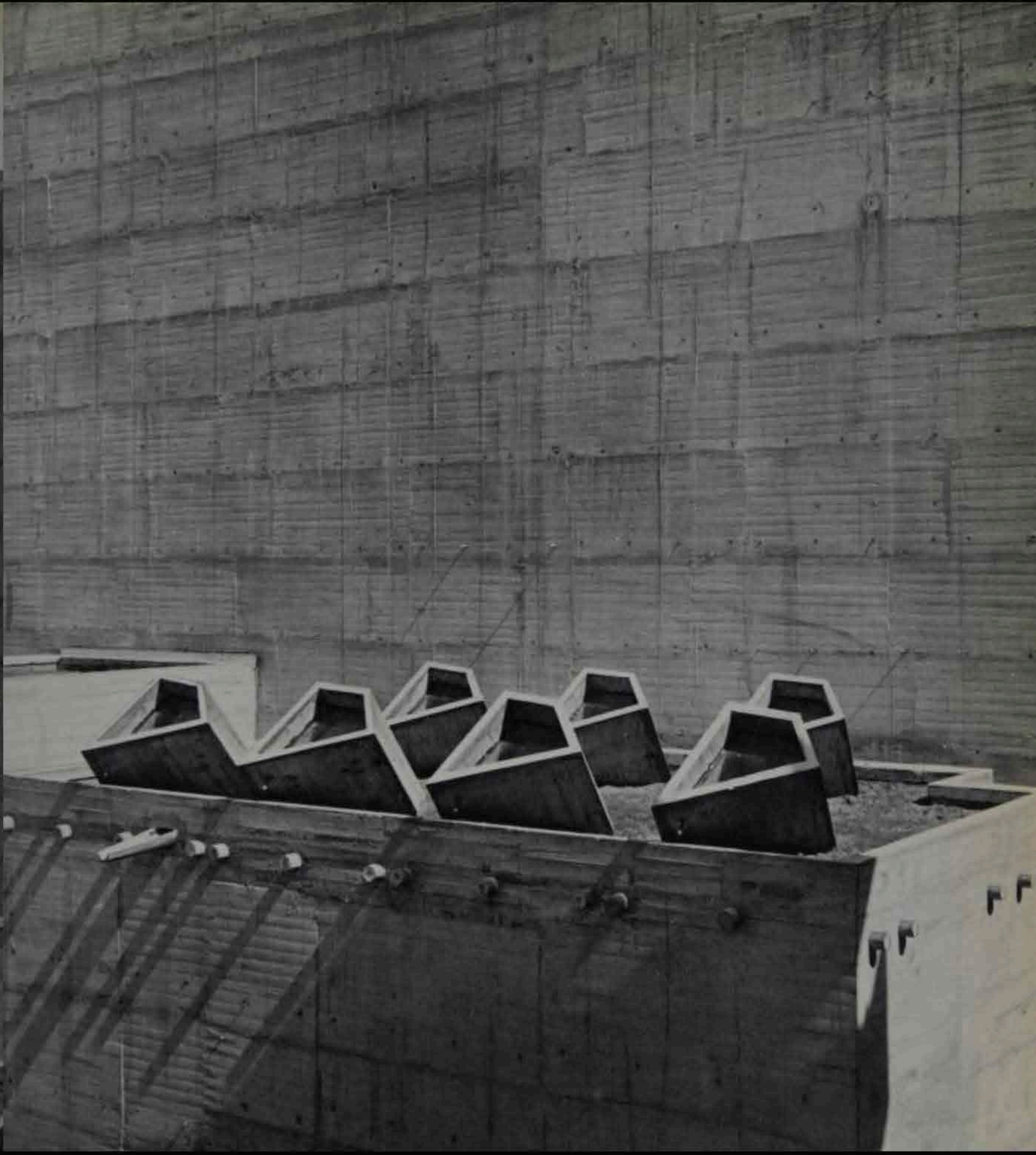
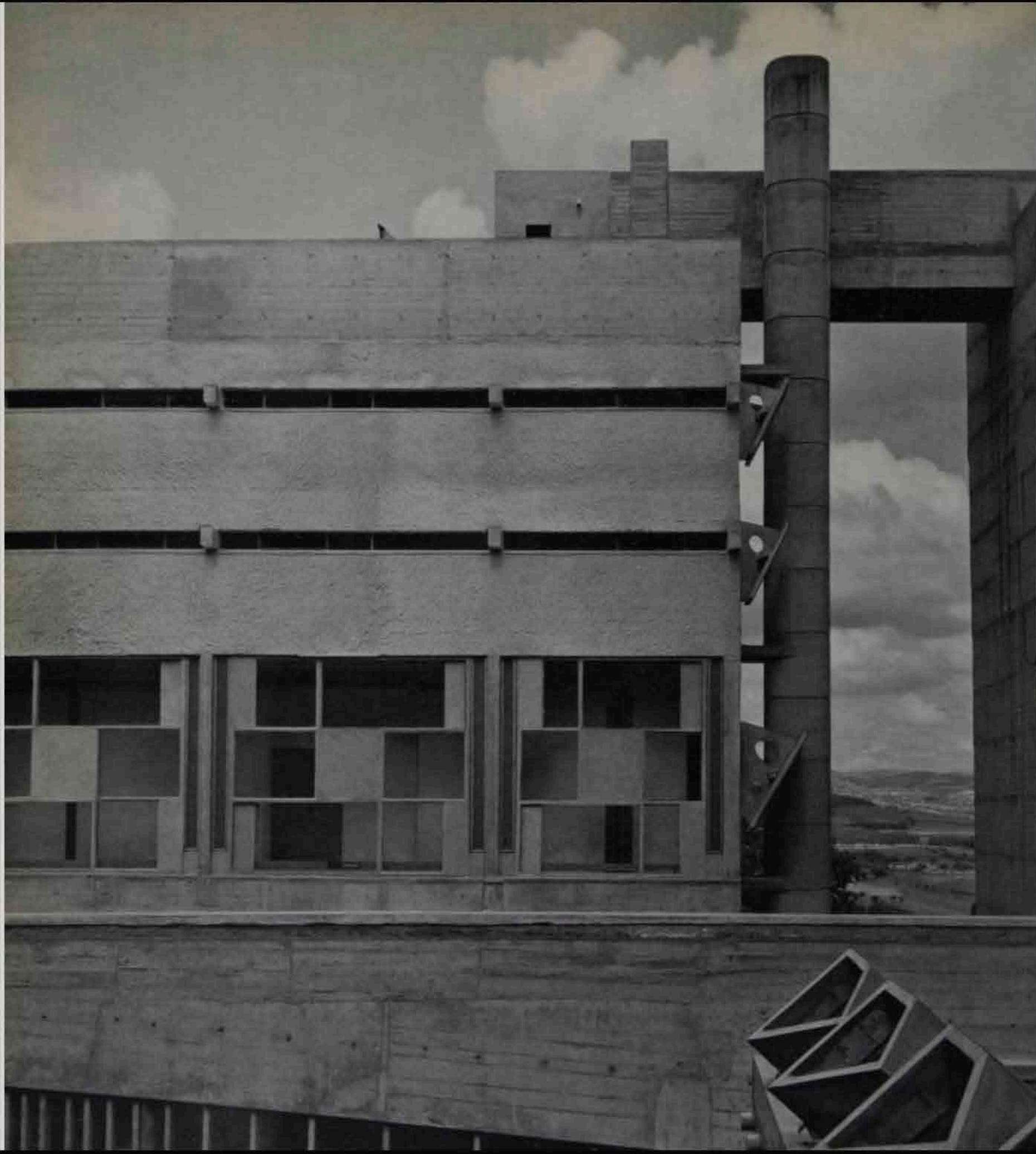


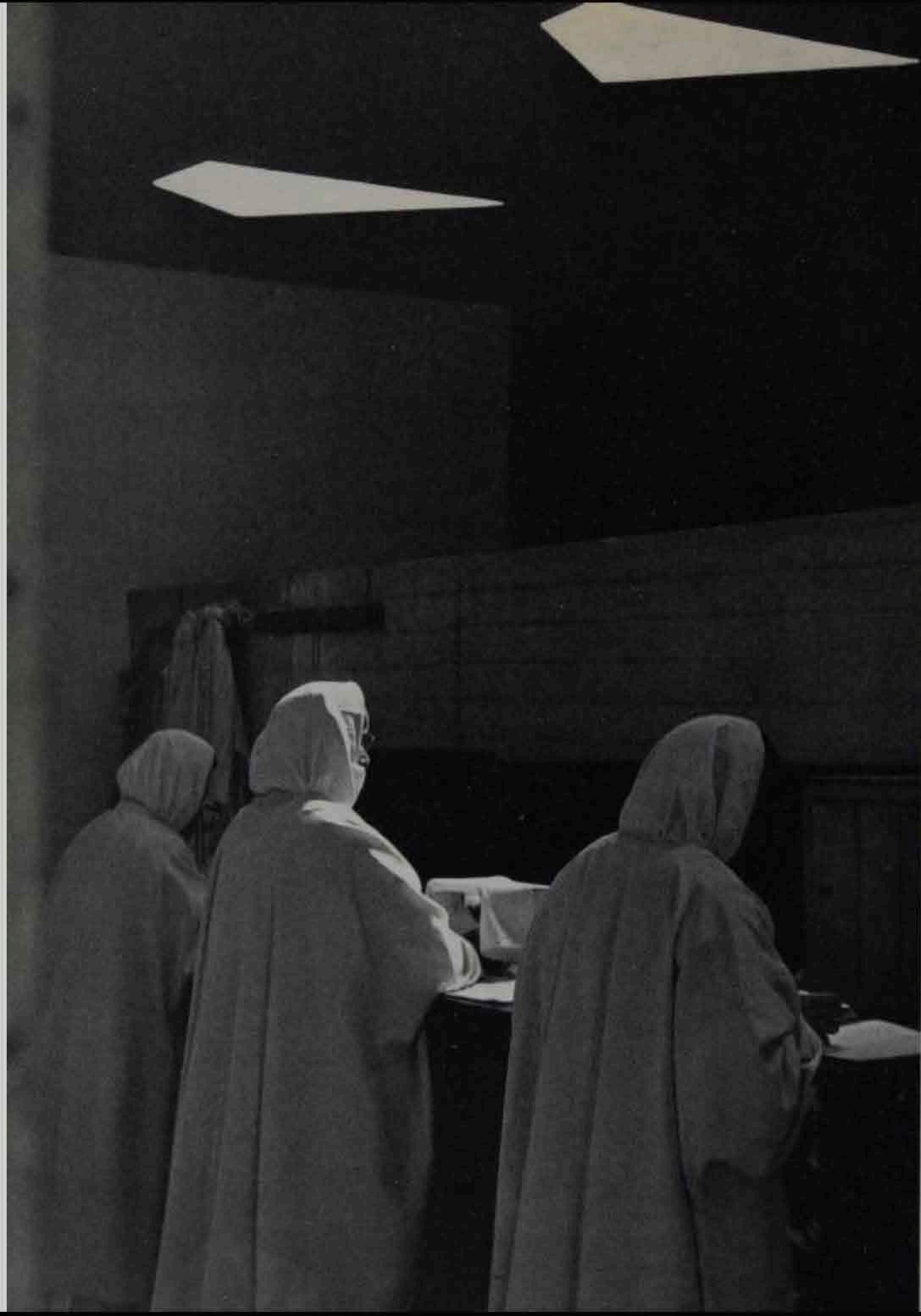




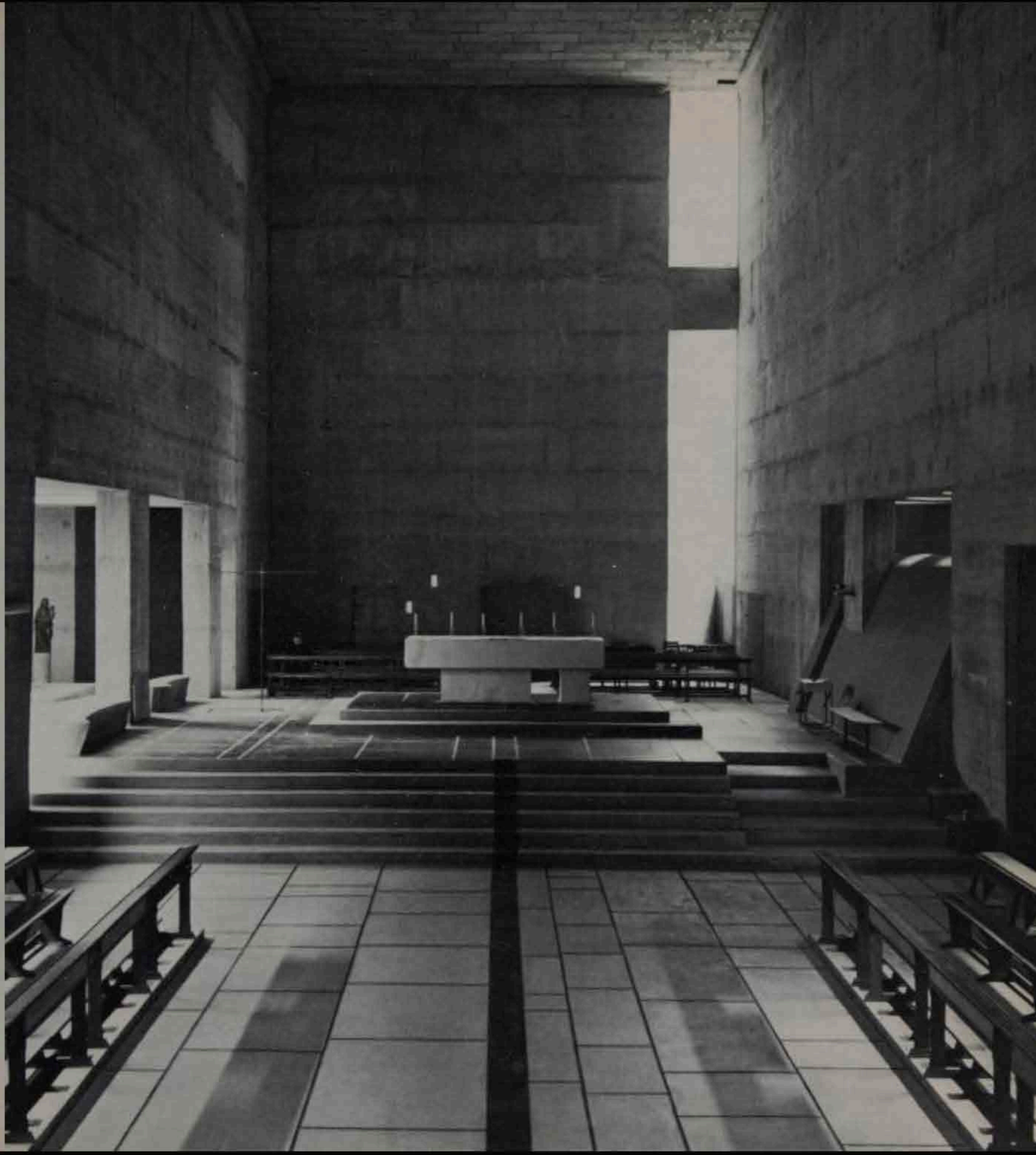
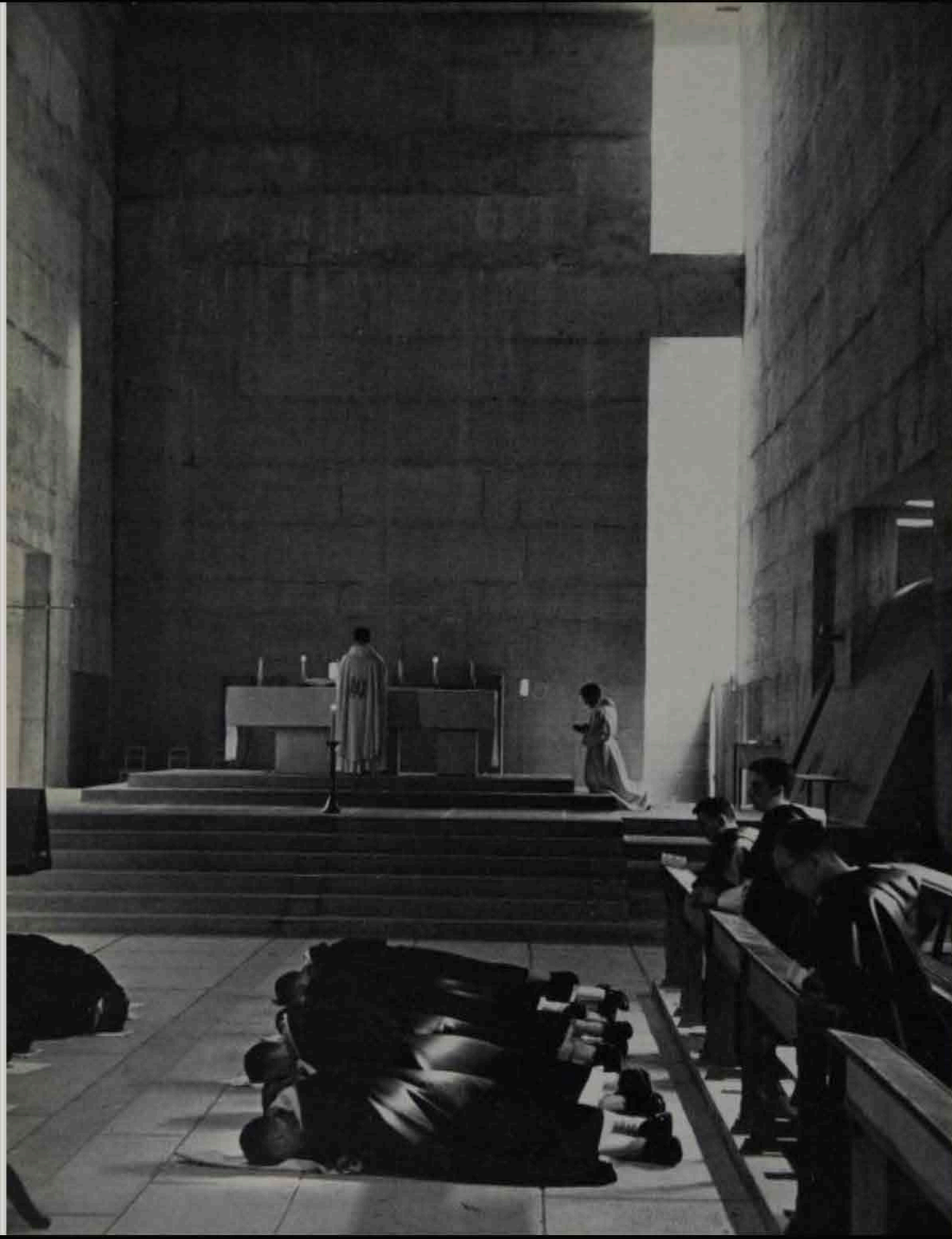




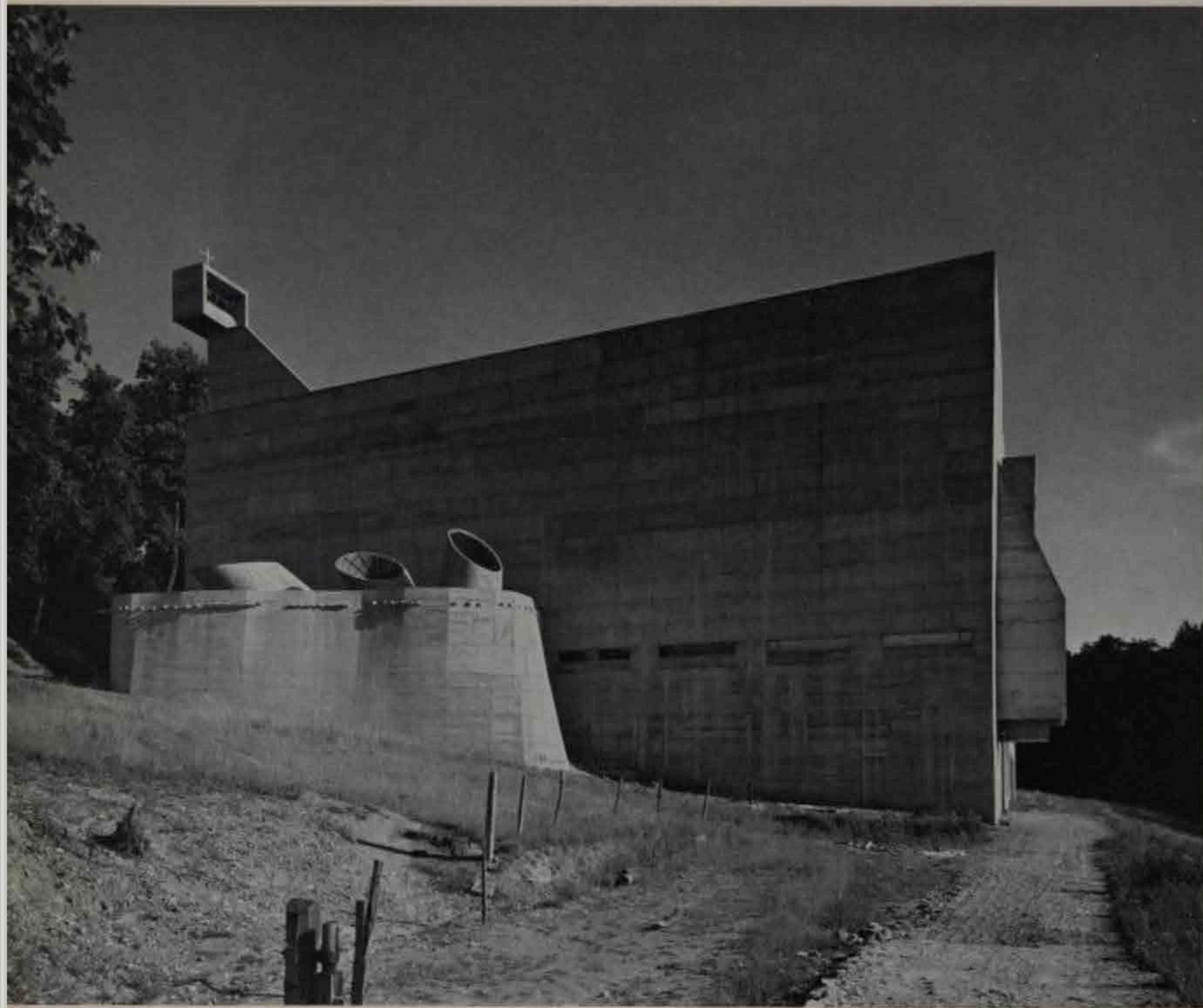


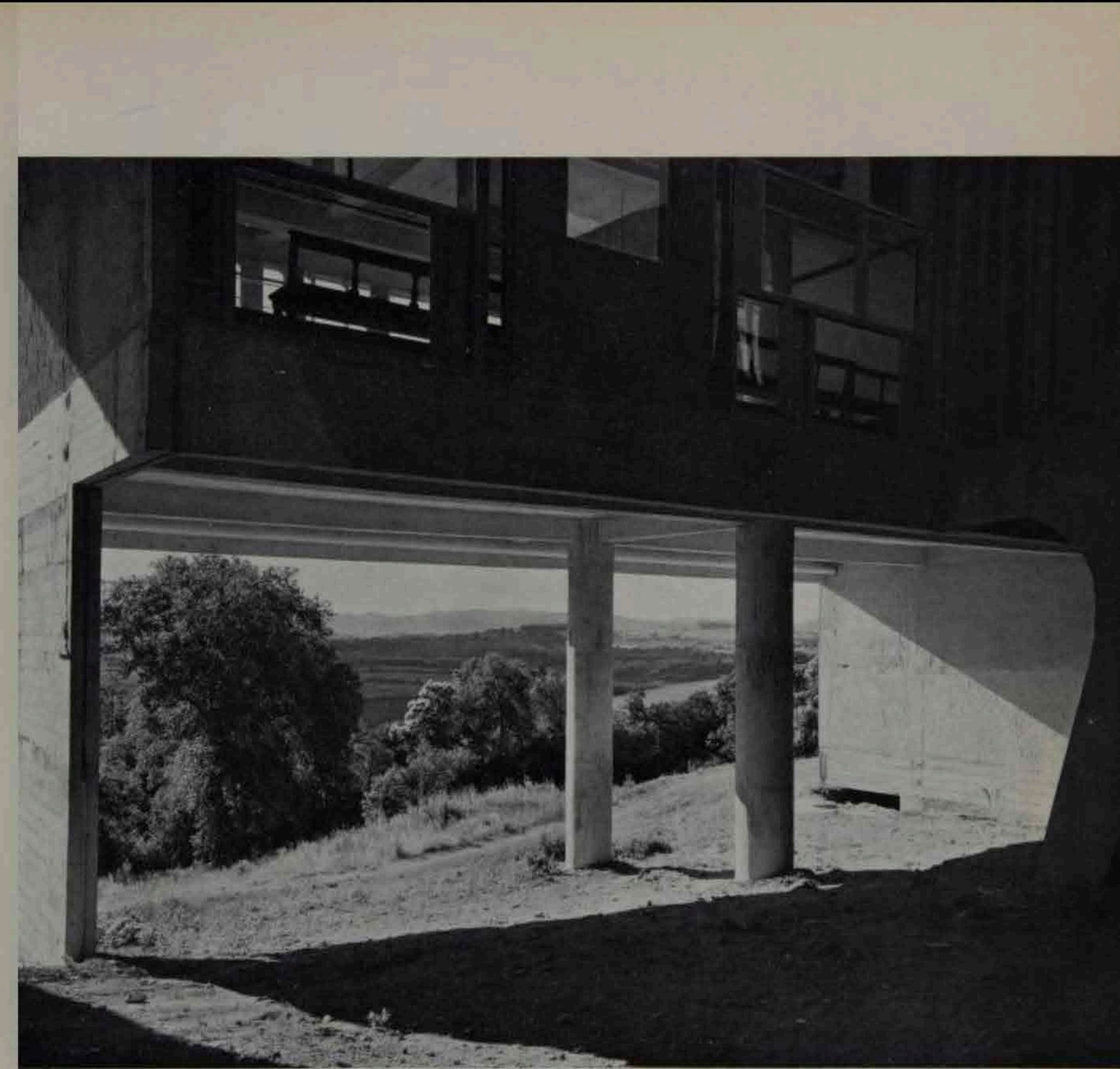
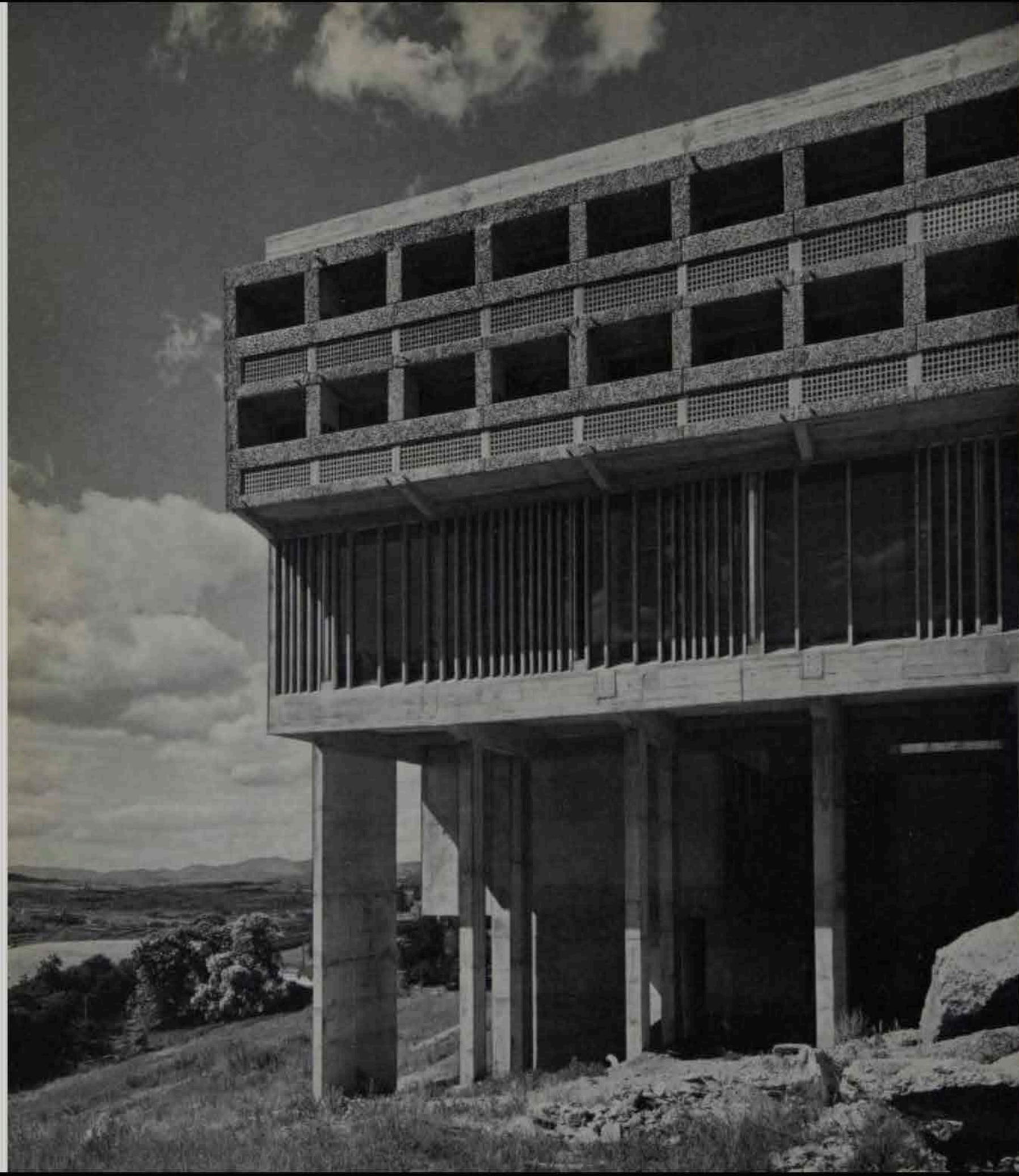




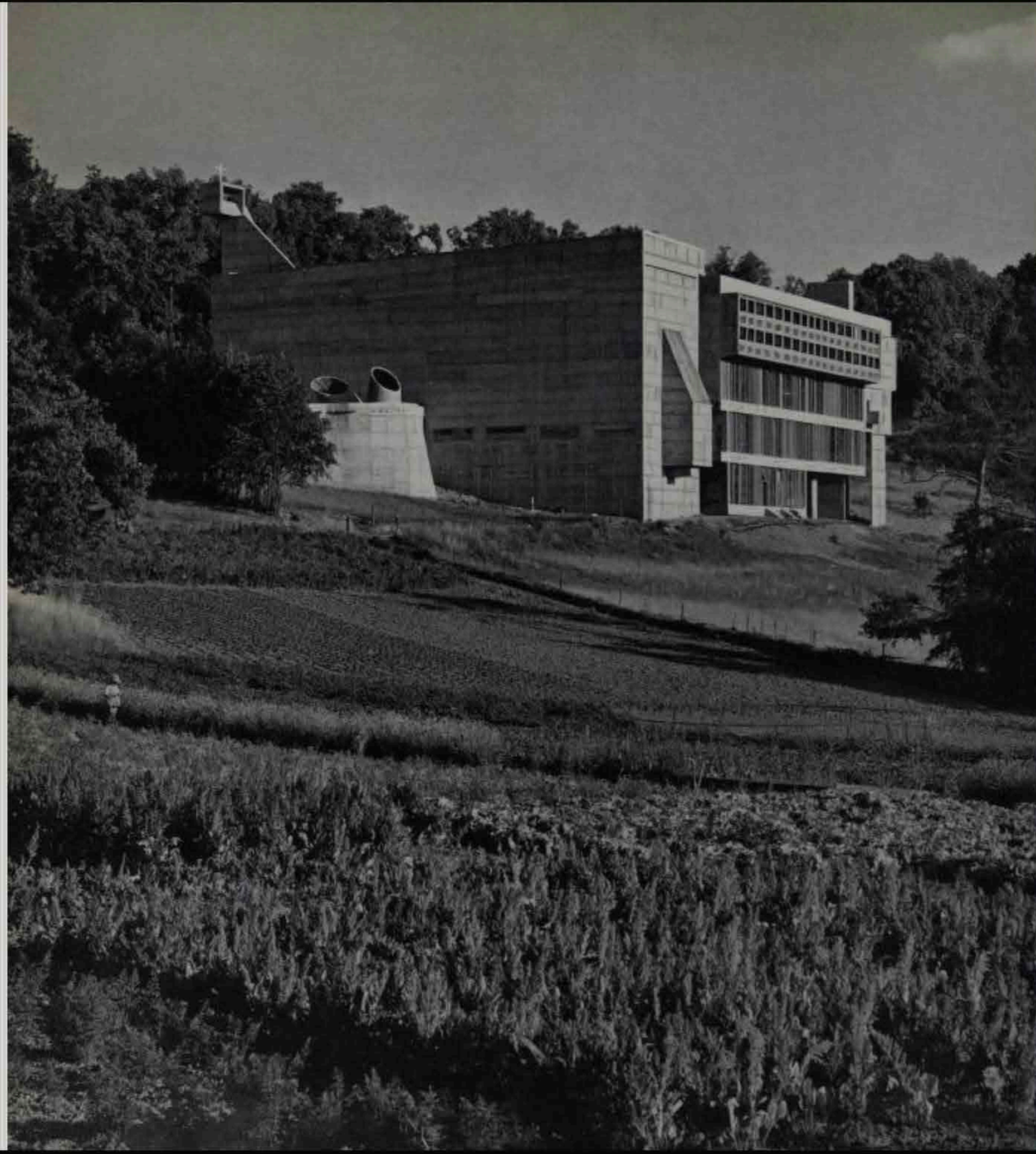


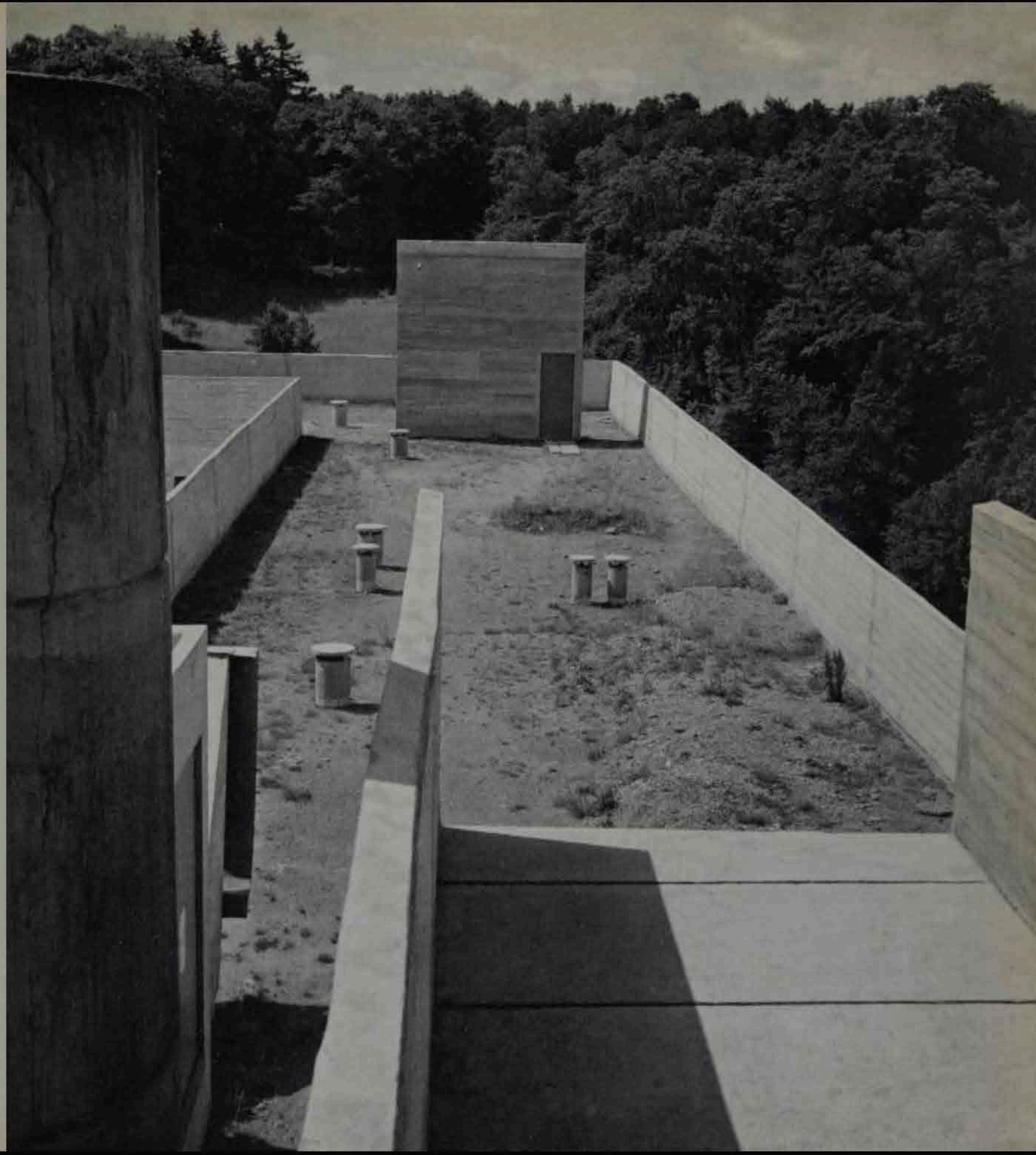
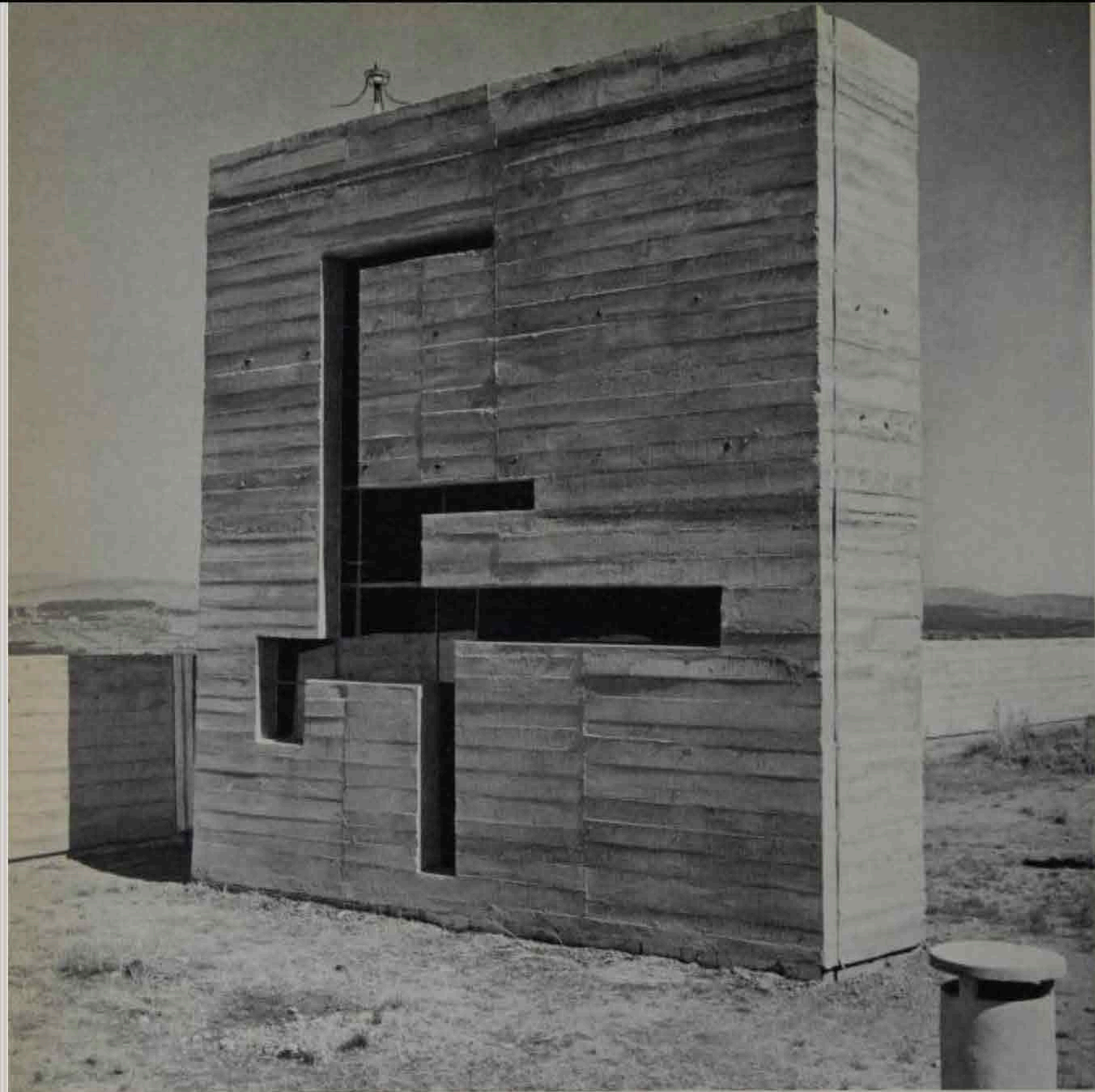


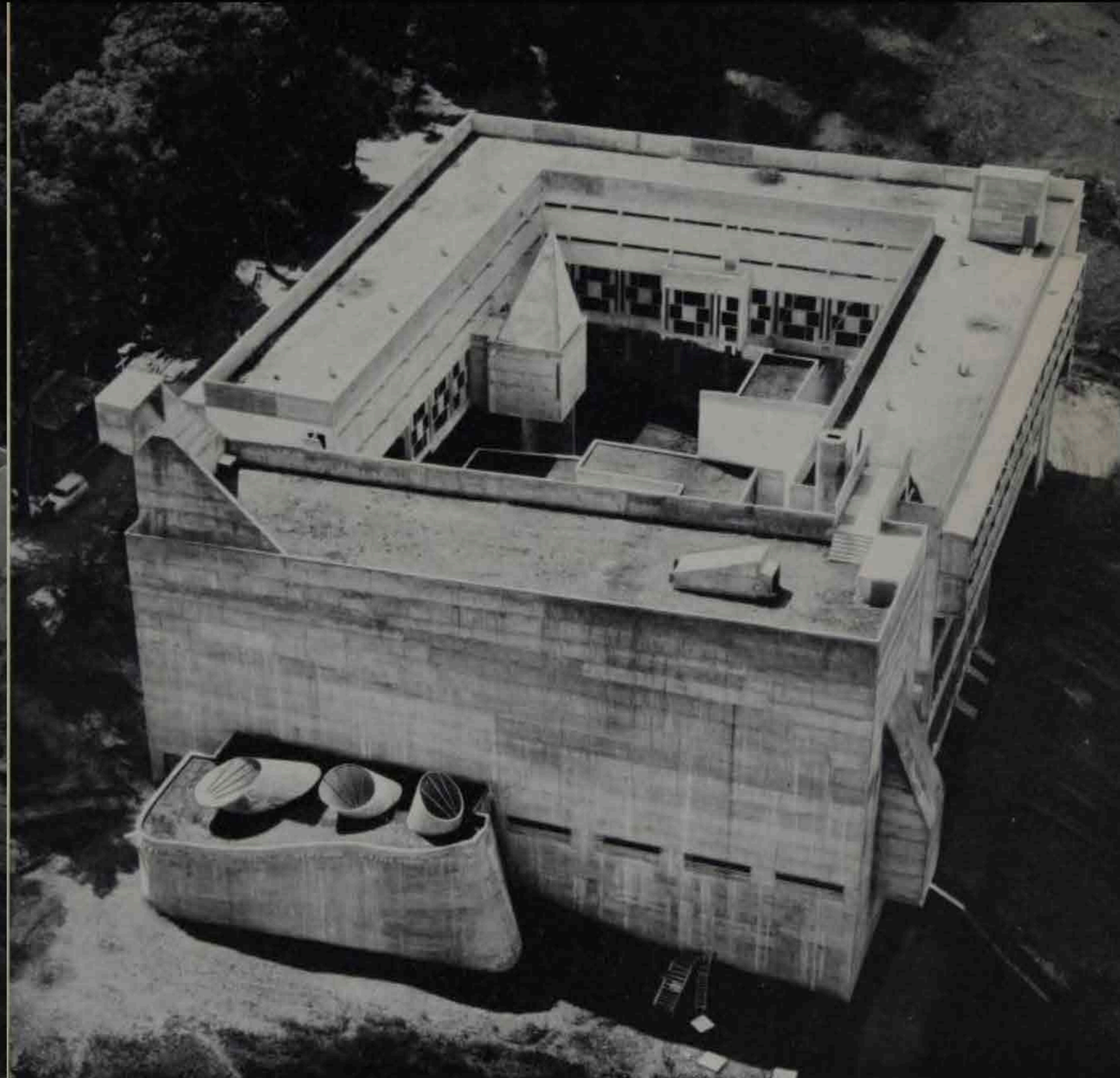
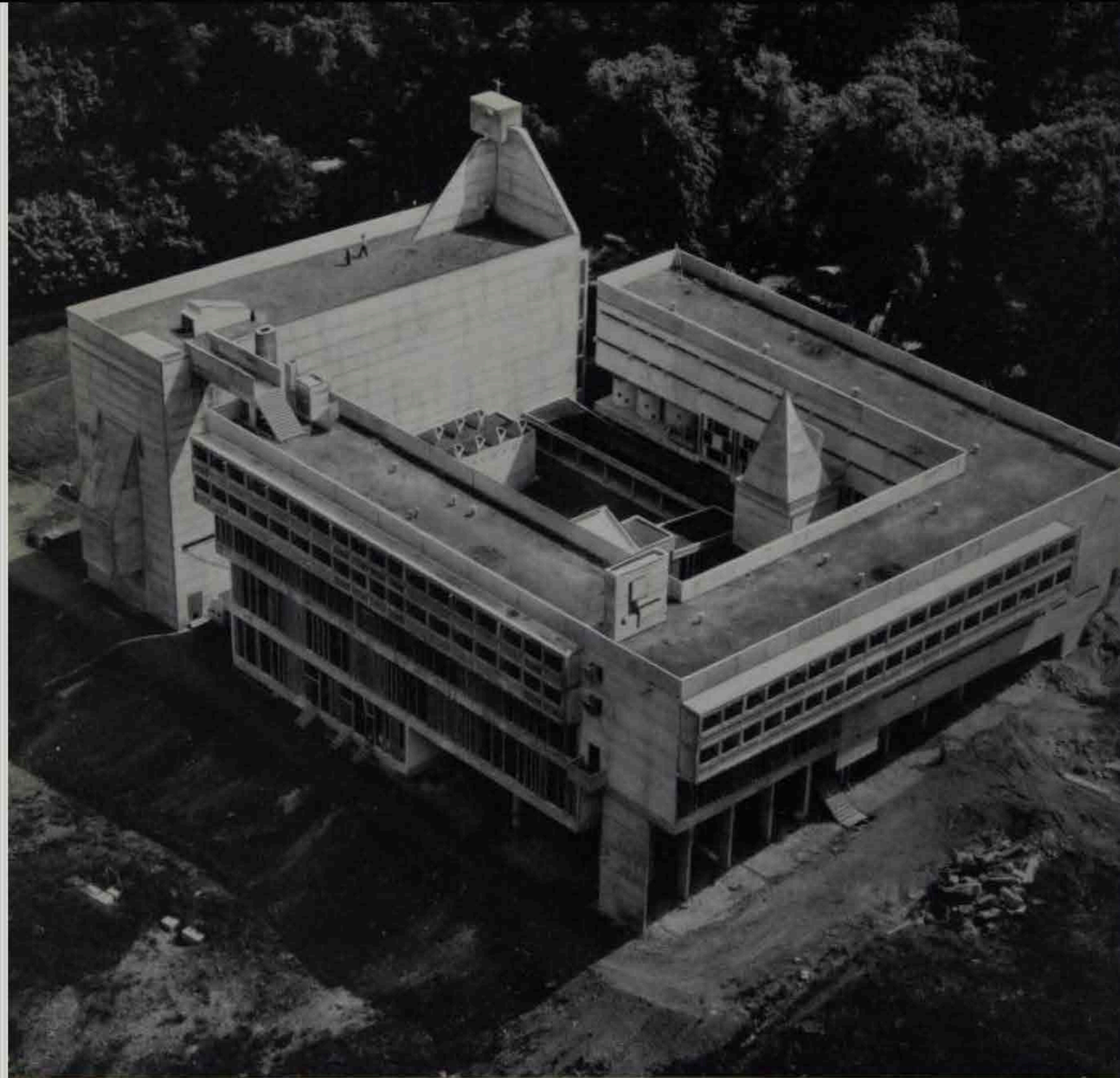














Plates

The section of plates contains additional photographs by the following:

Jean Caps / Edition du Cerf, Paris, pages 50, 51 and 53;

Cellard / S. P. A. D. E. M., Paris, pages 66 and 67

21 View of La Tourette from the approach road. Building begun on 7 August 1956, consecrated on 19 October 1960.

22 East wing with entrance and parlatorium.

23 Free-standing gateway frame at entrance. In the background, right, the conversation cells of the parlatorium.

24 Parlatorium viewed from the courtyard.

25 Interior of one of the conversation cells.

26 The pyramid roof of the oratory.

27 The oratory. The library in the background.

28 A glass wall in the courtyard, made of thin concrete frames, glass and panels. Right, a vertical ventilating slit with wooden flap closed.

29 A passage-way on the study floor.

30 In the library.

31 A lecture room. Exterior wall of undulatory glass in the background; concrete bars are placed in rhythmic sequence, horizontal bars formed of bronze rods. The panes are set in putty which always remains flexible.

32 The staircase tower in the courtyard in front of the west wing.

33 The spiral staircase in the staircase tower.

34 In the refectory. View of the courtyard wall.

35 The refectory.

36 View on to the countryside from the refectory.

37 In the monastery kitchen.

38 Cloister. Walls of undulatory glass. In the centre the atrium to which a triangular pyramid gives extra height.

39 View into the cloister at night.

40 In the cloister.

41 A gathering in the atrium of the cloister.

42 The cloister (Kreuzgang) in fact takes the shape of a cross (Kreuz) in the square of the courtyard. Left, the oratory; right, the staircase tower.

43 South wing. Reinforced concrete "pilotis". Left, the undulatory glass wall of a lecture room. Adjacent walls in unsurfaced reinforced concrete and sur-

faced walls which have been roughcast from a spray-gun. On the cell floors the surrounding panels of the loggias are made of gravel concrete, the grilles of the parapets of pierced plastic panels.

44 Corridor on one of the cell floors.

45 A cell with a view on to the loggia. The cell measures about 16 feet in length by about 7 feet in height.

46 The west wing (left) and the church are separate from one another. To the left in front of the west wing is the chimney. In the foreground are the "light guns" of the sacristy.

47 The sacristy in the courtyard.

48 Monks in the sacristy. In the ceiling the hatches of the light guns.

49 The lower church before the permanent altars were erected. The ceiling is made of panels of prestressed concrete.

50 The altars in the lower church.

51 The monastery church, view from east to west. The body of the church is 143 feet long by 36 feet wide.

52 Corporate mass in the church.

53 The church looking east. Left, the sacramental chapel. Right, the sacristy. The church roof rises by about 5 feet from east to west. It is made of reinforced concrete panels cemented to transverse girders. Faced with light building panels (hard-board). Walls of poured concrete reinforced vertically with shoring frames, horizontally with bracing wires. No expansion joints.

54 View into the sacramental chapel. Light entering above the altar through one of the round light guns.

55 Lower church and sacramental chapel from outside. Light guns made of concrete, white glass openings.

56 La Tourette viewed from the north. View of the church.

57 East and south wings.

58 Western corner of the south wing.

59 Columns and piers of different shapes support the building.

60 South and west wings.

61 The five stories of the west wing: kitchen, refectory, rooms for study, cell floors.

62 The monastery lies between forest and field but stands aloof from nature.

63 The ridge-turret on the church.

64 Head of a ventilating shaft.

65 Grasses and wild flowers grow on the roof. On top of the concrete roof lies a skin of bitumen covered with aluminium. Soil is strewn on top of this.

66 Aerial view of La Tourette from the west.

67 Aerial view of La Tourette from the north.

68 From the roof of the church the view stretches far into the Beaujolais country. Left, the top light of the church.

The Dominican college of Sainte-Marie de la Tourette lies above Eveux-sur-l'Arbresle in the département of Rhône. Eveux lies on Route nationale 7, Paris—Lyon, 26 km. west of Lyon.

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